

# The Navnāth Sampradāya and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

## Part One

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*The following is the first of six articles based on a long piece about the Navnāth Sampradāy which was available for a number of years on the Internet at [http://nisargadatta.net/Navnath\\_Sampradaya.html](http://nisargadatta.net/Navnath_Sampradaya.html)*

*The article has been revised and enlarged by the author for the Mountain Path.*

**I**n January, 1978, I stepped off a plane in Bombay and entered another world. As my taxi raced through the streets at three o'clock in the morning, past the street sleepers, I felt as though I had entered the city of the dead. The next day, Mr. Hate, the guru's son-in-law came by to pick us up (I had come with a friend.) He told us stories about

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his guru, Sri Nisargadatta his father-in-law, and about his wives, the first was the daughter of the guru, who had died, and the second was the one that his guru had picked out for him. Sri Nisargadatta's daughter had died suddenly, but before she did, she laughed with her father. His second wife was picked by Sri Nisargadatta and now they were happily married with a new baby. We went to the market place to buy some fruit as an offering for the guru. Finally, we arrived at 10 Khetwadi Lane, Kitty-corner from the Alfred Cinema and awash with the cacophony of the street.

Inside was a small bronze man with burning eyes. He was about to have a shave from an itinerant barber and was lathered up to his cheekbones. He glared at me and I wondered if I was insane to have come all this way. His intensity was simultaneously frightening and captivating. Since we were about the same height, I could look directly into his eyes, the eyes I had travelled more than half way around the world to meet, the eyes of an enlightened being. Although I had a spiritual teacher in California, I wanted to meet a bonafide Indian Enlightened Guru. He wasn't angry, he was just pure intensity. What I was to learn on other occasions was that he was also pure Love.

In 1976, I had discovered Sri Nisargadatta's book, *I Am That*, in the book review section of *The Mountain Path*, put out by Sri Ramana Maharshi's ashram. Upon receiving the book it was obvious to me, that this teaching was similar to that of the Maharshi, pure non-duality, but in a style unique to Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. *I Am That* is a book of recorded dialogues, predominantly with Western spiritual seekers. I had written to the translator of the book, Maurice Frydman in 1976-77, to express my appreciation for bringing this teacher to light. Maurice Frydman wondered if I could find a publisher for *I Am That* in the United States. I said I would try, and promptly sent copies of the book to three publishers of spiritual books. Two of the publishers did not express any interest in publishing *I Am That*, the third, Stephen Levine of Unity Press expressed that he really liked the book, but said it fell outside the scope of Unity Press which was dedicated to Insight Meditation.

Stymied for a while, I waited to hear from Maurice again and instead got the news that Maurice had died. I decided then that I wanted to meet Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj in person.

After the initial meeting, with shaving cream, I felt shook up, not knowing if coming to meet Sri Nisargadatta was the right thing, but I was determined to go forward. Returning to the house on Khetwadi Lane, I was struck by how much this place was in the midst of the chaos which is Bombay. Stepping inside, into the dark house, going up the steep steps to his mezzanine, brought expectancy and fear again on my part. It was customary to prostrate before him and I could feel certain 'American' resistances within myself to bowing down before another human being. Yet once I did it, I had a taste of bliss well up within myself. The translator explained that the prostration meant, 'none of me, only you'. Prostration became increasingly blissful the more I did it. But this was only my first time and I was anxious and uncomfortable.

The room was long, dimly lit and painted with a green colour that looked like the colour of rusty copper. Around the room were drawings and photographs of ancient men that I did not recognise. Each one had a dab of red paste on their foreheads. At the far end was a massive silver altar with a painting of Sri Siddharameshwar (Sri Nisargadatta's guru) above it. Flower garlands hung over the portrait, as they did on many of the other pictures in the room. Maharaj was sitting on some kind of animal skin, beneath a mirror, which faced another mirror. Slightly to the side was a photograph of Sri Ramana Maharshi. On the other side of the mirror was a portrait of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. People were already sitting on the ground in front of Maharaj who was already engaged in a dialogue with a young woman from Germany, who had recently come from Sri Ramanasramam.

Maharaj was talking about Vithoba and Tukaram, and the play of devotion. As time went on in this little room, I realised that Maharaj had a very direct way of pointing out our self nature, that he had practical instruction. He also was part of a lineage. We Westerners were eager for the instruction which was so direct. Maharaj had little patience for Western intellectualism, spiritual concepts and marketplace mentality and over the time I was there, he threw some people out. He was famous for throwing people out of his house. This was a method of instruction, however on my first day of satsaṅg, he was involved in the play of guru and disciple, and he was encouraging the woman disciple from Germany, to take mantra initiation. I was both jealous (I thought

that I would be the one getting this kind of attention) and puzzled. I Am That had no hint of devotion as part of his instruction. Yes, he spoke devotionally about his guru, Sri Siddharameshwar, but not much else. Perhaps he knew that we Westerners were not really attuned to such feelings; that our form of non-duality was more about discrimination, Self-Knowledge. We all were coming for the no-nonsense, rapid fire approach we had read in the book, and yet, here in front of me was a sweet divine reenactment of the play between guru and disciple and I did not quite get its implication. I am not trying to say that devotion is necessary for awakening to the truth of one's self nature, however, I believe it has figured in Maharaj's lineage.

One morning I came early, early enough to catch a glimpse of Maharaj in his morning pūjā and devotional preparations. After reading from a holy book (I do not know which one), he carefully cleaned and re-anointed each picture in satsaṅg room. He was very deliberate in placing the garlands around the pictures as well. I began to wonder who these personages were to command such love and respect from Maharaj himself.

Later, during my visit, I was 'assigned' a translator for the duration of my visit. Suamitra Mullarpattan, became my translator and friend. He regaled me with stories about Sri Nisargadatta, and when I asked him about the lineage he told me that Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj had been a householder and his guru, Bhausaheb Maharaj, had been one too. Somehow, this made an impression on me because I had the image that most gurus were swamis or monks; the idea that anyone could become enlightened, if they looked within, in earnest, became most compelling. Certainly, the immediacy of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj's transmission had caught the attention of many seekers treading the spiritual path in the 1970's. Although, for the entirety of the past twenty four years my attention has been focussed on the liberating teachings of Sri Nisargadatta, in the last five years, the whole context in which he lived and the lineage from which he sprang, became more relevant to me. I became curious whether part of his relevance to us as Westerners (he had Indian disciples, too, but his mode of transmission was different), had to do with the fact that he was a householder in the midst of a modern metropolitan city. Although many of us might consider a spiritual genius like Sri

Nisargadatta Maharaj an anomaly, I believe that it is no freak of nature that a practically illiterate cigarette seller from the back lanes of Bombay became awakened. This miraculous occurrence has to do somewhat with his lineage.

I learned that the lineage which Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj was part of – in fact, the full flowering of – what was called the Navnāth Sampradāya, the lineage of the nine gurus. For the last twenty-four years I have been confused as to who the nine gurus were and what significance they had in the Maharaj’s teaching. Maharaj himself did not stress his lineage with most of his Western devotees. However, he does speak about it in I Am That:

“Question: I see here picture of several saints and I am told that they are your spiritual ancestors. Who are they and how did it all begin?

“Maharaj: We are called collectively the ‘Nine Masters’. The legend says that our first teacher was the Rishi Dattatreya, the great incarnation of the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Even the ‘Nine Masters’ are mythological.

“Question: What is the peculiarity of their teaching?

“Maharaj: Its simplicity, both in theory and in practice.

“Question: How does one become a Navnath? By initiation or by succession?

“Maharaj: Neither. The Nine Masters’ tradition (Navnath Parampara) is like a river — it flows into the ocean of reality and whoever enters it is carried along.

“Question: Does it imply acceptance by a living master belonging to the same tradition?

“Maharaj: Those who practice the sadhana of focussing their minds on ‘I am’ may feel related to others who have followed the same sadhana and succeeded. They may decide to verbalize their sense of kinship by calling themselves Navnaths. It gives them the pleasure of belonging to an established lineage.

“Question: Do they in anyway benefit by joining?

“Maharaj: The circle of satsang, the company of saints expands as time passes.

“Question: Do they get hold thereby of a source of power and grace from which they would have been barred otherwise?

“Maharaj: Power and Grace are for all and for the asking. Giving oneself a particular name does not help. Call yourself by any name — as long as you are intensely mindful of yourself, the accumulated obstacles to self-knowledge are bound to be swept away.

“Question: If I like your teaching and accept your guidance, can I call myself a Navnath?

“Maharaj: Please your word-addicted mind! The name will not change you. At best it may remind you to behave. There is a succession of gurus and their disciples, who in turn train more disciples and thus the line is maintained. But the continuity of tradition is informal and voluntary. It is like a family name, but here the family is spiritual.

“Question: Do you have to realize to join the Sampradaya?

“Maharaj: The Navnath Sampradaya is only a tradition, a way of teaching and practice. It does not denote a level of consciousness. If you accept a Navnath Sampradaya teacher as your guru, you join his Sampradaya. Usually you receive a token of his grace — a look, a touch or a word, sometimes a vivid dream or a strong remembrance. Sometimes the only sign of grace is a significant and rapid change in character and behaviour.

“Question: I know you now for some years and I meet you regularly. The thought of you is never far from my mind. Does it make me belong to your Sampradaya?

“Maharaj: Your belonging is a matter of your own feeling and conviction. After all, it is all verbal and formal. In reality there is neither guru nor disciple, neither theory nor practice, neither ignorance nor realization. It all depends on what you take yourself to be. Know your self correctly, There is no substitute to self-knowledge.”<sup>1</sup>

We must take Maharaj’s stance of abiding beyond all manifestations of outer guru, all beliefs in dualisms when we look at his sampradāya. This abidance in Self knowledge is imperative as we look at events that can only take place in the ephemeral passage of time.

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<sup>1</sup> Frydman, Maurice,(trans.), *I Am That*, Part II, chapter 97, p.271.

With this as our perspective, we can delve into what the Navnāth Sampradāya really is and was. The Navnāth Sampradāya refers to the original nine gurus that came from the transmission of Dattātreya. As Maharaj has said, there is a definite mythological quality to these stories and many of them are quite miraculous.

Dattātreya's parents were both extremely pious and practised austerities for a long time in the hopes of gaining a boon, the birth of a son. His mother wanted a child who would be the incarnation of Nirguṇa Parabrahman (the formless infinite). As it is impossible to make the formless take form, Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva all agreed to take incarnation as their child. Dattātreya was an avadhūt, one clothed in space, he was perceived as a naked ascetic. Dattātreya did not claim to have a traditional guru, he claimed to have twenty four gurus, such as water, the seas, an arrow maker, etc. He learned different kinds of virtues such as "Forbearance from the Earth, Luminosity from the Fire, Unfathomableness from the Ocean, Seclusion from a Forest, and so on until he ultimately synthesizes all these different virtues in his own unique life."<sup>2</sup>

He could find spiritual instruction in these and other naturally occurring phenomena. Dattātreya is considered the epitome of the renunciate. His Avadhūt Gītā was considered so essential that sannyāsins (renunciates) who have thrown everything else away are reported to have retained a copy of his Gītā.<sup>3</sup> Yet, Dattātreya's approach of using every possible thing and experience, for one's meditation is totally appropriate for those who tread the path of the householder.

The Avadhūt Gītā itself is one of the clearest expositions of non-dual truth. Although the entire Avadhūt Gītā is of value in this study, there is not space enough to share all of it. In Chapter II, verse one, Dattātreya says, "Hold not the immature, the credulous, the foolish, the slow, the layman and the fallen to have nothing good in them. They all teach something. Learn from them. Surely we do not give

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<sup>2</sup> *Srimad Bhagavata*, XI. 7 as quoted by R.D. Ranade in *Mysticism in India: The Poet-Saints of Maharashtra* 1983. p.9.

<sup>3</sup> Shastri, H. P. (1989). *The Avadhut Gita*. Shanti Sadan. p.8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

up a game although we have mastered it?”<sup>4</sup>

In keeping with Dattātreyā’s use of all kinds of gurus, we find all these usually derogative are categories given some deference and value. This theme is carried further in Chapter II, verse two, “Think not lightly of thy Guru should he lack letters and learning. Take the Truth he teaches and ignore the rest. Know well that a boat painted and adorned, will carry you across the river; so also will one that is plain and simple.”<sup>5</sup> Neither the guru nor the disciple need be erudite. They only need to be situated in the truth. It is interesting to find this teaching of Dattātreyā as it perfectly describes Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj who was a simple and illiterate man, whose transmission was largely based on direct experience, not scriptural reference nor book knowledge.

In Chapter IV, verse 19, Dattātreyā says, “When Atman, the absolute existence alone is and It is I, then where is transcendental Truth, where is bliss, where is knowledge, secular or spiritual?”<sup>6</sup> Truth beyond all dualities is for those who have spent time practising and have an experiential grasp of what these words truly mean. The avadhūt is definitely encouraging us to go beyond our fondest spiritual concepts. To further stress this he says in Chapter IV, verse 21. “Renounce, renounce the world, and also renounce renunciation, and even give up the absence of renunciation. By nature all-pervasive as space, knowledge absolute art thou.”<sup>7</sup> This takes us beyond any dualism we can image about our station of life, whether that of a renunciate or householder-detachment, and situates us in the Absolute.

Dattātreyā is depicted as an ascetic with the heads of Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva. He encompasses the designation of god as creator, preserver and destroyer. He holds in his six hands various spiritual objects, the japa mālā (rosary), the water pot, the damaru (the drum of creation), the trident, the conch, and the discus. The damaru and the trident are always the accessories in Śiva’s hands; the conch and the discus are usually Viṣṇu’s. The water pot is one of the few

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.21.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.30.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.30.



Rishi Dattatreya

possessions of an ascetic, as is the japa mālā. Dattātreyā is also depicted with four dogs who represent the four Vedas.<sup>8</sup> Although the Navnāth Saṁpradāya begins with a great ascetic sage, Dattātreyā, his transmission transcends any designation, renunciate or householder.

Dattātreyā supposedly instructed Patañjali. There is a reference to this on a web site, ‘Biographies of Indian saints’. “Regarding the works by him, probably the most controversial is that it is mentioned in the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa that he taught the Aṣṭāṅga Yoga to Patañjali, who then wrote the yoga sutras.”<sup>9</sup> This may be apocryphal but it does show the stature of Dattātreyā that his name is invoked to give authority to the school of yoga enunciated by Patañjali. Dattātreyā is said to have initiated Matsyendranath (or Matchindra Nath), the first in the lineage of the so-called nine gurus.

The fundamental purpose of the Navnāth Saṁpradāya is resolutely practical. Though dynamic metaphysical enquiry was encouraged as a means to the realisation of the truth of Brahman, it was but one part of the yoga discipline necessary for the ultimate transcendental experience. We see this thread running through the saṁpradāya, which in the 20th Century found its fulfillment in Nisargadatta Maharaj. ▲

*(To be continued)*

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<sup>8</sup> <https://swamisamarth.com/guru-parampara/lord-shree-dattatreya/> Retrieved on 25.06.2022

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.angelfire.com/indie/saints/bio1> Retrieved on 25.06.2022.

# The Navnāth Sampradāya and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

## Part Two

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According to my Nisargadatta Maharaj translator, Mr. Suamitra Mullarpattan, the Navnāth Sampradāya began around the 9th century and was active until the 14th Century. Through correspondence with Mr Mullarpattan I learnt that the first Nath guru was Matchindra Nath who is also known as Matchindranatha or Matsyendranath. He was said to be initiated by Lord Śiva, one of the *Trimurtis* (Viṣṇu, Śiva and Brahma), in the science and teaching of Yoga. The second guru Gorakha Nath, also known as Gorakhnath or Gorakshanath, received direct initiation from Matsyendranath. Gorakhnath was an important Nath both in the lineage and in the historical development of yoga in the land of Bharat (India). He established a definitive system, choosing

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the best and ‘purest’ techniques of the various religious sects, prevalent at the time. He was a spiritually powerful *jīvanmukta* (realised soul) whose influence down the centuries has been fundamental. Legend has it that he was responsible for the awakening and rescue of his guru, Matsyendranath, from the clutches of a tantric sect in a kingdom ruled by women. Matsyendranath was immersed in a pleasurable life with the queen of that kingdom. To save his guru, Gorakhnath entered the queen’s palace and recited the ‘awakening mystic-call’ of the Nath sect, which awakened Matsyendranath from his delusion.<sup>1</sup>

After Gorakhnath there were another seven gurus in the lineage: 3) Jalandhar Nath; 4) Kanifa (or Kanhoba) Nath; 5) Charapati Nath; 6) Naga Nath; 7) Bhartari Nath; 8) Revan Nath; and 9) Gahini Nath.

Though the lineage apparently started in the Nepal area it seems to have migrated to western India. I have also found that he is credited to having written some Tantras, among them the *Kaulajnananirnaya Tantra*.

The scholar Georg Feuerstein writes: “As the first of the siddhas, the Tibetan sources mention Luhi-pa (Luyi-pada) who is most probably identical with Matsyendranatha, the teacher of the famous Gorakshanatha...The *natha-siddhas*...deserve to be singled out for separate treatment by virtue of their enormous influence on the development of Yoga.”<sup>2</sup>

He also writes: “Matsyendranatha, the Lord of fish, probably lived in the early part of the tenth century A.D. He is regarded as the first human teacher of Hatha Yoga and may have been the originator of the Yogini branch of the Kaula School and the Nathapanth (sect.) Nath means master or lord and refers to a Yogi who enjoys both, liberation (*mukti*) and supernatural power (*siddhi*). Matsyendranatha is considered as one of the eighty-four great adepts (*maha-siddhas*) and is known also as Minanatha or Luipa. Luipa can be a short form of Lohipada. He is also venerated as the guardian deity of Nepal in the form of the transcendental bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See also Eliade, Mircea, *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom*, Bollingen, 1973. p.309-10.

<sup>2</sup> Feuerstein, Georg, *Textbook of Yoga*. Rider, 1975. Chap.10. p.109-10. See also <http://www.shivashakti.com> A site dedicated to hatha yoga speaks of Matsyendranath.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.111.

Avalokiteshvara is the Bodhisattva of Compassion, the world protector. As we can see, there are many perspectives as to who exactly Matsyendranath was, but we know that he was pivotal in Tantra, Yoga, and the Natha traditions. How these practices are viewed depends on the perspective of the commentator. From the perspective of my translator friend, Mr. Mullarpattan, Matsyendranath, reveals that in his adventures at the edges of Tantra, his powers of discrimination were clouded and it seems evident to me, that the transformational aspect of Tantra transmitted through the Navnāth lineage had the sexual aspects expunged. The movement had a dominant Saivite base with a pervasive *sakti* (energy) element. It was strongly practical and not a speculative, philosophical movement.

On a site dedicated to travel in the Mangalore I find mention of Matsyendranath. "...Goddess Mangaladevi who is enshrined in a temple at Bolar built in the tenth century in memory of a famous princess of Kerala who is said to have accompanied Matsyendranath, the protagonist of the Nath cult."<sup>4</sup>

Eventually, this lineage made its way down to the west of India, flourishing in Maharashtra. In *Mysticism in Maharashtra*, R.D. Ranade (himself a member of the Navnāth Sampradāya) writes, "When and how Matsyendranatha and Gorakshanatha actually lived and flourished, it is impossible to determine. But it remains clear that they cannot be unhistorical names. Behind Matsyendranatha, we have mythology, but after Matsyendra, we have history..."<sup>5</sup>

Professor Ranade also makes it clear that the Natha lineage flows right into the ocean of the Maharashtrian Saints, like Jnanadev. He writes, "It is certain that Nivrittinatha and Jnandeva came from the spiritual line of the great Gahininatha, as more than once authentically evidenced by the writings of both Nivritti and Jnanadeva themselves. That Nivrittinatha was instructed by Gahininatha in spiritual knowledge, that Gahininatha derived his spiritual knowledge from Goraksha and Goraksha from Matsyendra, it is needless to reiterate."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mangaladevi\\_Temple](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mangaladevi_Temple)

<sup>5</sup> Ranade, R.D. *Mysticism in Maharashtra*, Aryabhushan Press, Poona.1988. p.19.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.19.

I was informed by Mr. Mullarpattan that Gorakhnath purified the spiritual practice, jettisoned complicated, empty rituals, and recommended and enhanced the path of *raja-yoga*. The purpose of this yoga was to purify the mind which leads to its liquidation or neutralisation. This in turn resulted in pure consciousness bereft of ego-individuality. Subsequently the pure consciousness subsides into *Nirguṇa Parabrahman* (the formless transcendental reality).<sup>7</sup>

Of the nine Natha gurus, it is with the eighth guru, Revan Nath, (or Revananath) that the modern Navnāth Saṁpradāya begins. My correspondence with Mr. Mullarpattan who had explored deeply the Nath tradition reveals that, “Revan-Nath, who as an infant was discovered on the sandbeds of the river Reva [Narmada River].”<sup>8</sup>

Revan Nath (also known as Revananath or Kadha Siddha) established the still active Kādsiddheshwar temple and math on the heights of the Siddhagiri hills, at Kanheri village, Kolhapur district of Maharashtra. With Revananath there was a bifurcation of the lineage, and Gahininath was the last of the recognised Nath gurus of the original tradition.

It was Revananath who established a new lineage which today finds its fullest expression in the Inchegeri Saṁpradāya. After him came the following gurus: 2) Kad-Siddheshwar Maharaj; 3) Guru Lingam-Jangam Maharaj who was also known as Sri Nimbargi Maharaj (ca.1789-1875); 4) Sri Bhausahab Maharaj (1843-1914); 5) Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj (1875-1936); and 6) Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897-1981).

Mr. Mullarpattan tells me that the first two gurus of this new tradition were not householders, but renunciates. There is an account of Revananath meeting Dattātreyā and Matchindranath, “One day while engaged in agricultural work he had the vision of Sri Dattatreyā and by his grace he attained *mahimasiddhi* (occult power) on the basis of which he had performed several miracles. Therefore he became famous as ‘Revanasiddha’ in that region. After sometime, Matchindaranath paid a visit to that region. Owing to the occult power tiger, lion and other such wild animals forgetting their enmities were

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<sup>7</sup> Personal correspondence.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

found to be with Matchindranath. On seeing this, Revananath was flabbergasted. Revananath realized that his *Mahimasiddhi* was of no help. This could be accomplished by *Brahmajñāna* (realisation of God). According to his wish Matchindranath took Revananath to Sri Dattatreya. Sri Dattatreya initiated Revananath into spiritual life and Revananath spent some time in penance under the guidance of Sri Dattatreya and Revananath realized God...”<sup>9</sup>

Although the sequence of events and the flow of time is obviously not that clear, there is a definite spiritual connection with Dattātreyā and the Navnāth lineage. We know that after Revananath there was a guru called Kad-Siddheshwar Maharaj, though this guru could be Revananath under another name. Since he began what is called the Muppin Muni tradition, he is also considered the first Kādsiddheshwar (*kādh* means ‘jungle’). To add to the complexity surrounding his name he was also known as Muppina Muni. Whatever his name he was undoubtedly a seminal figure of the Navnāth tradition.<sup>10</sup>

About this *saṃpradāya* Sri Gurudev Ranade remarked: “This may be called ‘*Swarupa-Sampradaya*’ — a Tradition of ‘Self-Vision’, which has been adopted since ancient times by seers like Narada, Yajnavalkya and others up to the modern times by saints like Jnaneshwar, Tukaram and Sri Nimbargi Maharaj.”<sup>11</sup>

From Revananath the lineage then passed onto Nimbargi Maharaj. K.B. Dabade writes: “The saint of Nimbargi was born in 1790 in Solapur (Maharashtra) but spent his life in Devar Nimbargi, a village in Bijapur district (Karnataka). He belonged to a Neelawani sub-caste of Lingayat caste. His surname was Misalkar and Narayana or Nagappa was his horoscopic name. His disciples used to address him as Narayanrao or Bhausahab. He was also known as Gurulinga Jangam Maharaj which was in fact the name of his Guru (the spiritual

<sup>9</sup> Dabade, K.B., *Sociology of Religion: a Case Study of Nimbargi Sampradaya*. Mangala Publications, 1998. p.50.

<sup>10</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaadsiddheshwar> retrieved 13.10.2014.

<sup>11</sup> *Silver Jubilee Souvenir: Pillars of Sri Gurudeva's Sampradaya and Heart-Homages to Sri Gurudev*. Vol. 1. ACPR, Belgaum. First Edition 1978. Sri Nimbargi Maharaj was the 23rd Muppin Muni; Sri Bhausahab the 24th. The 25th is unclear. The 26th received the title at the age of seventeen. Later he received *atma-jnana* (Self-knowledge) from Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj.

preceptor). But he used this as his ensign, in the songs composed by him.”<sup>12</sup>

Virasaiva or Lingayat affiliations were and are prevalent in Karnataka and western India. In the introduction of *Sociology of Religion of the Nimbargi Sampradāya* we find an explanation of the Virasaivist movement. “Veerasaivism is a twelfth century reformist movement in Karnataka led by Basava – a charismatic leader, and his followers. The core of Veerasaiva teachings is its refusal to recognize the principle of ritual pollution and purity, basic to Brahminical Hinduism. The biological processes such as birth, death, menstruation, spittle and *jati* (caste) cause ritual pollution necessitating segregation of persons for a fixed period before purification is effected. Veerasaivism proclaims non-observance of five kinds of pollution. Veerasaivism does not recognise ritual pollution and in practice it is considerably diluted. Veerasaivism refuses to make a distinction between auspicious and inauspicious occasions on the ground that the Linga emblem of Siva knows no pollution.”<sup>13</sup>

Lingayats wear a *lingam* on a chain, they need no other external representation of the deity. It is significant that some of the founders of the Navnāth Sampradāya are Lingayat or Virasaiva which was a revolutionary movement, allowing people of all walks of life, and both sexes to find Siva immanent within themselves. Part of this democratising movement, I believe, is a response of western India’s contact with Islam, which embraces people of all class, creed and gender.

The iconoclasm, which is at the heart of Virasaivism actually comes down to us in the twenty-first century as something we can easily relate to. The breaking down of taboos, of certain parts of India’s spiritual structure makes it possible for us as modern people to partake of these teachings. We do not even have to be practising Hindus, in the traditional sense, in order to hear it. This attitude was most evident in the satsang room of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj.

Returning to Nimbargi Maharaj, he had a dream, in which Vittal, (also known as Vithal, Vitthala and Vithoba, name of Viṣṇu) appeared

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<sup>12</sup> Op.cit., Dabade, p.49.

<sup>13</sup> Op.cit., Dabade, p.41.



Sri Nimbargi Maharaj

to him and told him to go to the town of Siddhagiri.<sup>14</sup> He went to the temple where he saw a yogi who gave him a mantra and told him to meditate regularly on it.<sup>15</sup> But he returned home and forgot about it. Realising the negligence of his chosen disciple, the yogi one day came to the house. The guru was welcomed into the house and he asked for two rupees as an offering. Nimbargi Maharaj had to borrow them as he did not have them himself. The guru returned them and said that he should use one for his family life and one for his spiritual life.

Sri Nimbargi Maharaj asked, “Can the worldly be made happy, by meditation on God?” The sage replied, “Nothing is impossible to the grace of God.”<sup>16</sup> This was the start of Nimbargi Maharaj’s practice in earnest. He was a dyer of cloth but he felt that being a shepherd would be more conducive to his spiritual practice. His practice took thirty-six years, from the age of 31 to 67. His life was apparently uneventful, a normal family life. At the age of 67 he became Awakened and turned over his mundane affairs to his son. He initiated people and lived the life of a *jīvanmukta* until the ripe age of 95.<sup>17</sup>

Sri Nimbargi Maharaj says in his *Bodha-Sudhe*, v.14,

Hypocrisy means outward show of meditation on the Self (Atman) while inwardly one is engrossed in thought of worldly objects. We should never entertain hypocrisy because God is omniscient and omnipresent, He knows all. Therefore never try to deceive Him by means of hypocrisy.<sup>18</sup>

He also talked about not being a burden to others and that one should not be a beggar. He says in v.29:

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<sup>14</sup> *Sri Nimbargi Maharaj (His Life and Teachings)*, Introduction, Despande, M.S., Academy of Comparative Philosophy and Religion (ACPR), Belgaum. 1978. p.2.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>16</sup> *Nectar of Illumination: Teachings of Shree Nimbargi Maharaj*, Nimbargi Maharaj; (‘Shree Maharajarawar Vachana’) 1908, 1975. Compiled by Raghunathacharya Adya and translated by S.Gajendragadkar & S.Bhagwat. p.11.

<sup>17</sup> *Op.cit.*, *Nimbargi Maharaj, His Life and Teaching*, Despande, p.3.

<sup>18</sup> *Op.cit.*, *Nimbargi Maharaj, His Life and Teaching, Bodhe-Sudhe*, ‘Hypocrisy’. p.21.

One should never lower one's hand for the one's needs. If one takes thus from others, one's wants would ever remain unsatisfied. The begging hand would be cursed and polluted. Therefore, one should always have one's hand raised up (for giving).<sup>19</sup>

“Priests and *jangams* [Saivite order of wandering monks] get their hands cursed by their greed for other's property and by lowering their hands for that purpose. They will therefore never succeed in their undertakings; their poverty will not cease and their wants would remain unsatisfied. Therefore, one should not accept from others anything gratis or in charity. One should be giving to others with one's means.”<sup>20</sup>

This is obviously a criticism of renunciates who make a big show of their austerity and yet remain attached within. I personally witnessed Sri Nisargadatta's disgust of a swami, dressed in ochre robes with whom he had shared a podium. After the talk, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj picked up the offerings of money that he had received and placed them before the swami. Later he said that the swami only spoke to feed his belly and needed the money more than he did. One can surmise that this distrust of behaving spiritually ostentatiously and the mistrust of certain kinds of renunciates, were transmitted from guru to disciple and still pervades the *sampradāya*. It also makes a point that being a householder with interior renunciation was more virtuous than that of a *sannyāsin* who was not inwardly renounced.

Spiritual practice while living the life of a householder was challenging for Sri Nimbargi Maharaj and demanded internal renunciation. In v.16 of his *Bodhe-Sudhe*, he says:

Wife, children and grandchildren, involve us in infatuation and that is known as ‘*Maya*’, (attachment). We should avoid that trap of i.e. temptations. We should not love our children too much. At the same time, we must not fail to arrange their food and clothing. We should behave with them as though they are the children of others; if we bestow extra care on them

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., ‘Do not hold down your hand (like a beggar),’ p.21.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.28.

out of selfishness, it will harm them. Getting the way they do, we should not involve ourselves into the trap of their Maya-attachment and become partners in their joys and sorrows.”<sup>21</sup>

Sri Nimbargi Maharaj’s approach was to remain detached while in the midst of life. From the modern western perspective, his approach may seem insensitive, however, there is truth in his stance toward family life in as much as one tries to be fully participatory and yet vigilant towards attachment. Perhaps this is a warning against spoiling children, a point that strikes me deeply at heart!

His book of teachings contains advice on how to work, its proper attitude, the danger of idleness, the uselessness of anxiety. He writes this about meditating while working in the world:

“On getting initiated by Sadguru in spiritual life, you should continue to work with hands and repeat the name of God in your mind. Work with your hands, meditate on God Hari, like thread in the spider’s web, watch your breath inhaling and exhaling (i.e. weave name God through every breath, as the spider weaves the web with its thread).

“You should live the domestic life like a labourer, who does his work always with an eye on his wages. In the same way you should work sincerely for the wages, that is, earn enough money to maintain your family, but all the time you should meditate on God. The body alone should be engaged in work while the mind and soul should be completely engrossed in Atman.”<sup>22</sup>

This quote expresses the emphasis of the Navnāth Saṁpradāya, in keeping the focus on the Absolute while apparently engaged in the activities of daily life. The use of mantra was instrumental in keeping that focus, and has been transmitted down through the lineage. In the next chapter we will explore how that transmission continued through mantra initiation and direct exposition of truth. ▲

*(To be continued)*

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., ‘Snare of Temptation,’ p.22.

<sup>22</sup> Op.cit., *Nectar of Illumination: Teachings of Shree Nimbargi Maharaj*, Chapter 49, ‘Meditation while Working with Hands.’ p.84.

# The Navnāth Sampradāya and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

## Part Three

CATHERINE WEISS BOUCHER

In Part Two we saw with Sri Nimbargi Maharaj the beginning of the modern historically documented Navnāth Sampradāya. He was the first modern guru of whose life and teachings we have reliable evidence. Sri Nimbargi Maharaj (ca.1789-1875) entrusted the lineage to Sri Bhausahab Maharaj (ca.1843-1914) who upheld and enriched the tradition.

Sri Bhausahab Maharaj was born into a *deshastha brahmin* caste and was named Sri Venkatesh Kandrao Deshpande. Sri Bhausahab met Sri Nimbargi at the age of 14 and was given mantra initiation by a Sri Sadhubua at the instance of the saint of Nimbargi. As Sri Bhausahab was from a *brahmin* caste and Sri Nimbargi Maharaj was a Lingayat, Bhausahab experienced considerable opposition both

In 1971, a transcendental experience launched the author's spiritual practice and she was introduced to the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi. In January 1978, she was graced to sit at the feet of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. In 2002, she did a study of *Navnath Sampradaya*. Sri Nisargadatta still guides her life.

from his family and his community, which in those days exerted a powerful controlling influence upon its members with a real fear of ostracism. That did not deter him from his eagerness to follow and practise under the tutelage of Sri Nimbargi Maharaj. He was awakened and authorised by Sri Nimbargi to carry on the lineage.

In the introduction of *Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj: Life Sketch and Nama-Yoga*, we find more evidence of his internal detachment and his attitude that life in the world prepared one for spiritual practice:

“It resembles the *Abhyasa-Yoga* of the *Gita*. ‘To denounce and renounce worthless things’ is his Vairagya (dispassion). To attain the essential we must eschew the non-essential. Still like Sri Ramadas, the renunciation advocated by Sri Maharaj was internal and not external. Like Sage Vasistha, Sri Maharaj preferred ‘*Antastyaga*’, mental renunciation. He advised his disciples to perform their worldly duties with perfect diligence. But he warned them that they should consider their spiritual discipline to be the be-all-and-end-all of their life and that it should claim their highest loyalty. Hence, while they are engaged in the daily work they should not fail to meditate on the Divine Name.”<sup>1</sup>

Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj in a series of letters wrote to his sons and disciples about different aspects of spiritual life and practice. His letters and teachings have been gathered in a book called *Nāma-Yoga*. As mentioned earlier, the compilers and translators of this book have coined this term *Nāma Yoga*, however, Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj, himself called it *Jñāna Mārga*. Even though *Nāma Yoga* seems to have been a component of instruction coming down from Sri Nimbargi Maharaj, both Sri Nimbargi and Sri Bhausaheb evidently intended for it to be a practice of *jñāna*, wisdom, namely an enquiry into truth.

Sri Bhausaheb said: “A seeker should live in this world like a lotus-leaf in the lake, untouched by its mud. He should perform meditation while engaged in his worldly affairs. He should, however be very cautious here and should never fall a prey to the attractions of women and gold belonging to others. He should be satisfied with what God has granted him and steadily continue his spiritual Sadhana.

<sup>1</sup> Deshpande, M., *A Brief Life Sketch in Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj: Life-sketch and Nama-Yoga*. Belgaum: Academy of Comparative Philosophy and Religion. 1978. pp.5-6.

“Moreover, he should perform his worldly duties, with the utmost care and diligence. He should not shun them through idleness. He should constantly observe and examine his conduct at every step, and should always behave prudently. Imprudence is the source of misery. Still, with all our prudence we must not fail to realise that God’s will alone ultimately prevails. Hence we should be ever ready to abide by His will. When we are overwhelmed with dangers, we should not fail to remember Him and perform our duty.”<sup>2</sup>

Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj puts the emphasis in life on one-pointed meditation on God, but he does not believe that one has to remove oneself from life’s circumstances. Instead one should live life with this meditation as its purpose:

“A person is required to worship God for success in his worldly business as well. That would form his Worldly Religion, useful for his worldly life. But that is not all in all. That alone will not bring about fulfilment in his life. On the other hand, he should adopt the path of Spiritual Religion and try to identify himself with God through proper devotion. He should learn to adapt himself even to (adverse) places and (trying) circumstances in which he would be called upon to live through the will of God and should never give up meditation on the Divine Name on any account.”<sup>3</sup>

Although the moralistic tone of both Sri Nimbargi Maharaj and Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj may be hard to relate to in the twenty-first century, the advice given above provides a useful meditation theme for any modern man or women. Sri Bhausaheb takes us beyond the duality of the spiritual and the worldly. Here he strikes a chord similar to that of his renowned descendent, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj:

“Worldly life and Spiritual life, Duality and Identity, Censure and Praise are pairs of opposites in which, without the help of one, we cannot understand the other. Identity cannot be understood without duality; in the absence of censure the value of praise would not be realised. Likewise, without the help of worldly life, spiritual life cannot be properly realised. Worldly life is reprehensible no doubt. But its aid is quite necessary for attaining the commendable spiritual

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp.11-12.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.18.

life. We must realise all this properly and through the proper practice of meditation attain the love and bliss of spiritual life.”<sup>4</sup>

One wonders whether Sri Bhausaheb finds worldly life reprehensible because it is so easy to get enmeshed in all manner of attachments and desires or because it takes up so much of one’s time and attention. He does however stress, ‘Its aid is quite necessary for attaining the commendable spiritual life.’ The worldly life does provide financial sustenance and more than that, it provides opportunities for detachment, for compassion and for seeing the Absolute nature of all apparent manifestation. He even shows us that the illusion we get entangled in, is only God’s *māyā*:

“Man desires that the Lord should not throw him — entangle him, in the meshes of Maya. But it is futile to entertain this desire. Even the Lord Himself incarnates in the Maya, carries on displays of His sport [*līlā*] in it. How then can we be freed from Maya? When we are residing in the domain of Maya, we should develop devotion for the Lord, by remaining unaffected by Maya. Maya then could not affect us. We should learn to participate in the sport of the Lord, in the Maya of the Lord, like the Lord Himself. Never should we forget that Maya belongs to the Lord Himself, and then we won’t be troubled by Maya.”<sup>5</sup>

Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj, also known as the saint of Umadi, had disciples who were Lingayat and Muslim as well as from the Brahmin caste. He also had *harijan* (untouchable) disciples, which was quite unusual for the times. One of the Brahmin disciples, Sri Bagewadi Maharaj, was the spiritual teacher of Sri B.D. Jatti, former Chief Minister of Karnataka, Vice President and Acting President of India. This lineage became quite ecumenical as more disciples came into its fold.

Sri Bhausaheb established a *Math* (monastery) in the village of Inchageri, Bijapur district, northern Karnataka. He had several realised disciples. It appears the Navnāth Sampradāya then split into two major groups. One was led by those of Sri Amburao Maharaj, who appears to have been a prominent disciple of Bhausaheb. He functioned as a guru to his *guru bandhus* (guru brothers and sisters), particularly to Professor R.D. Ranade after Bhausaheb left the body.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.29.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p 36.



Bhausaheb Maharaj

The second branch was led by Sri Siddharameshwar, who was the guru of Sri Ganapatrao Maharaj, Ranjit Maharaj and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj among others.

Prior to writing this chapter, I had no knowledge about Bhausaheb's other disciples. I had a cursory knowledge about R.D. Ranade, from the books on the poet saints of Maharashtra. I was unaware of Nisargadatta's 'guru cousins', who had also carried on the lineage of Navnāth Saṃpradāya. I realized that this was an opportunity to delve into the branch of the lineage which included Sri Amburao (ca.1857-1933), Sri Sivalingavva (ca.1867-1930), Professor R.D. Ranade (ca.1886-1957) and Sri Girimalleshwar (ca.1873-1934).

All four of these disciples had been householders, and all four had encountered the loss of a spouse, a child or children, or their fortune. Their *sādhana*-s were kindled by these losses, and forged in the fire of their intense meditation, *guru bhakti* and *Nāma Yoga* practice. *The Silver Jubilee Souvenir*, Volume One, described the situation of these disciples, whom they regard as pillars of the *saṃpradāya*:

“Even suffering had its share in intensifying the sadhana. Jealousy, bereavement, and acute illness proved to be blessings in disguise. They all endured them with fortitude and equanimity and did not allow them to disturb their sadhana. They were all embroiled in relatively adverse circumstances, but they could still rise above them with the aid of their Master's grace. This shows how a strong will and firm faith coupled with profound devotion, could enable an aspirant to overcome mountains of difficulties and attain the cherished ideal.”<sup>6</sup>

Sri Amburao Maharaj, also called Baba by his devotees, was born to a poor but pious family in the town of Jigeewani. Later he was sent to live with an uncle in the town of Nimbargi. His uncle was in fact a disciple of Nimbargi Maharaj; he attended school there and had the *darśan* of Nimbargi Maharaj at this time.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Preface. In *Silver Jubilee Souvenir* (1st ed., Vol. I). Belgaum: Academy of Comparative Philosophy and Religion. 1978. p.viii.

<sup>7</sup> Kulkarni, K., & Sangoram, K., *Sri Amburao Maharaj : Life Sketch and Practical Philosophy*. Belgaum: Academy of Comparative Philosophy and Religion.1978. p.4.

He was orphaned at a young age. Then at twenty he went to live with an older brother and during this period he went to work at a Sankara Math. He later married and had a daughter. His wife and daughter both died and therefore he wished to marry again: “Thus Baba was left alone and his hopes and aspirations of a happy family life toppled down like a house of cards. The untimely death of his life-partner at such a youthful age preyed much upon Baba’s mind. He looked extremely disappointed and dejected.”<sup>8</sup>

He came across Sri Bhausahab, while working as a *kulkarni* (accountant). He had hopes of finding a wife and marrying again. He had come to Inchageri for a religious celebration which his sister had encouraged him to attend in order to lift his spirits. There, Sri Bhausahab recognized Amburao as a suitable disciple and was persistent in his offer of initiation.

Sri Amburao, felt ambivalent about this and tried to avoid taking mantra initiation from Bhausahab. But Bhausahab was able to convince Sri Amburao that he would take full responsibility for Amburao’s dedication.<sup>9</sup>

“Unable to resist this pressing assurance of Sri Maharaj, Baba finally agreed. Sri Maharaj, then showered his grace on him, initiated him through the medium of his spiritual brother Bhaurao of Savalsang and said: ‘Amburaya, now go on with meditation on this Nama.’”<sup>10</sup>

Amburao then dived into his meditational practice, which brought about a sudden and “...great mental transformation in him. Sri Maharaj’s words ‘Now go on with the meditation on this Name’ were ringing in his ears.”<sup>11</sup>

Amburao, like his fellow disciples, meditated ardently for up to nine hours a day on the Name. He had many intense spiritual experiences and was extremely devoted to his gurudev, Bhausahab. He initiated many disciples into *Nāma Yoga* and was an inspiration and guru figure to many of Bhausahab’s disciples; he was a true *guru-bhai*.

From Ranade’s website we learn, “After Bhausahab Maharaj died, Amburao Maharaj was the only saviour to all the devotees. He

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.6-7.

travelled far and wide to spread Bhakti and blessed many sadhakas by initiating them with *Nāma mantra*. Sadguru Shri Gurudev Ranade also followed his footsteps and sought guidance from him whenever needed. Amburao Maharaj and Gurudev Ranade were disciples of Sadguru Shri Bhausahab Maharaj, and were very close to each other as Guru-bandhu.”<sup>12</sup>

*R.D. Ranade and His Spiritual Lineage* is a description of how Amburao’s life and sadhana were perceived by his fellow *guru bhais*:

“...His devotion was not so much in the making, it was already an accomplished perfect product which could not have been improved except by making its roots go deeper into the soil of his most fertile faith and love...Baba did not make the transition from want of faith to faith or from an indifferent attitude of mind to that of faith and love. Faith & Love were there from the very beginning of fixing his gaze meditate on the tip of his nose and meditate on the Name continuously.”<sup>13</sup>

Here are a few of Amburao’s sayings:

“No.4. Undaunted by difficulties and calamities, meditate firmly with courage and love on the Name as instructed by the Guru and you will come to know that you alone are the happiest person in this miserable world.

No.10. Look at the illumined vision of God and meditate silently on His Name even when you are busy in doing other activities.

No.12. To see God everywhere is what is meant by real samadhi.

No.13. To become satisfied by looking at one’s own immaculate form constitutes true religion.

No.28. Any spiritual gain which is not the result of one’s own exercise of meditation lasts for a short time. But an experience which is the joint effect of one’s own endeavour and of the grace of God lasts forever, and is the progenitor of other spiritual experiences.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Sadguru Shri Amburao Maharaj. (2013, 1st August). from <http://www.gurudevranade.com/amburao-maharaj/>. The website was available on 23.03.2021.

<sup>13</sup> Date, V., *Sri Amburao Maharaja of Inchgiri*. In *R.D. Ranade and His Spiritual Lineage* (1st ed., pp.108-109). Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan; Jodhpur: Adhyatma Sahitya Vikas Sanstha. 1982, pp.108-9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.103-105.



Amburao Maharaj

## MOUNTAIN PATH

Amburao provided guidance to his many guru brothers and sisters, as an exceptional example of guru devotion and bhakti. He was scrupulously honest and his obvious integrity attracted new devotees to the lineage.

Sivalingavva of Jath, a female disciple, was discovered by Sri Bhausaheb when she was ten years old. She had a renunciative spirit and didn't want to marry; however, she did so at the suggestion of her guru, Bhausaheb. Her son and her husband both later died. In *R.D. Ranade and His Spiritual Lineage*: she is thus described:

“She was so enamoured of the meditative life that she was not prepared to get married. But on the advice of her Guru, she did get married. As nature would have it, a son was born to her who unfortunately died and also her husband died and though she was grieved she could, by the grace of her Guru turn her bereavement into part of her meditative life. She later composed a poem in which she stated that a son had been born to her. Fools might say that it was an illegitimate son born to her, but this is not so. It was the divine immortal child made of light, who she could always see playing with her. It was not given to anyone to have this experience. It was the fruit of a long, long sincere devotion to God.”<sup>15</sup>

Professor Ranade compared Sivalingavva to Muktabai and Mahadevi Akka, other female poets of note. As mentioned above she composed a poem about the birth of her spiritual son, using the son as an allegory for spiritual devotion and realisation. Use of the concept of significant relationships as symbolic of union with the Absolute is common in mystic poetry, ranging from Rumi to Sri Ramana. Here are a couple of verses, which were printed in the *Silver Jubilee Souvenir* Volume One:

A Spiritual Son is born to me  
To him let's sing a Lullaby!  
All the objects of pleasure now,  
Have been flung far away.  
Swing the Spiritual Cradle soon  
And attain the Lord's benign boon. (6)

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.234.

My Master has graciously granted  
A supremely beautiful baby  
Never shall I fail now  
To sing him a sweet Lullaby.  
You have broken my vicious cycles  
Of recurring birth and death.  
Ever, hence, shall I worship Thee  
Constantly day and night. (8)<sup>16</sup>

In *R.D. Ranade and his Spiritual Lineage*, Sivalingavva is described thus: “She could meditate at a stretch for six hours, changing her posture after three hours. That she had seen her own face [true identity] and had many photic, phonic and morphic experiences as visions of several bygone saints during her meditation is also a fact. All these were the fruit of her silent meditation on the Name of God.”<sup>17</sup>

While Sivalingavva never took on the role of a guru, she did initiate devotees into the spiritual life. Remarkably, Professor Ranade himself bowed down before her, something he rarely did, in homage to her importance to the lineage and to the depth of her realisation.<sup>18</sup>

She is important in a lineage that is otherwise filled with illustrious men. Later, Jean Dunn would distinguish herself as a disciple of Nisargadatta, and there were other women who had roles in the Siddharameshwar lineage, but Sivalingavva’s importance confirms Bhausaheb’s true sense of egalitarianism.

The third disciple of Bhausaheb is Girimalleshwar Maharaj (also known as Girmallapa). He was born and lived in Jamkhandi. He was a celebrated merchant who was wealthy and highly respected. He was also a strong man, who enjoyed sports, as well as being inclined towards spiritual matters. He had a generous disposition and built a temple. He was familiar with many spiritual texts including the *Jnaneshwari*, *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Dasbodh*. He longed for a Sadguru.

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<sup>16</sup> Saint Sivalingavva: In *Silver Jubilee Souvenir* (1st ed., Vol. I), Belgaum: Academy of Comparative Philosophy and Religion. 1978. pp.142-3.

<sup>17</sup> Op.cit., V. Date, p.238.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.238.

The website set up by his ashram states that he:

“...knew that unless with Sadguru’s blessings it is difficult to attain the Truth. At the same time when his heart was yearning for Sadguru, he suffered a great loss in his business and ultimately understood the incompleteness and instability of human life. This incident made him turn towards the path of Self-realization which opened the doors of introspection, which resulted in the purity of mind and detachment. When this state is reached, one is ready to meet the Sadguru. Thus finally, at the appropriate time Shree Girimalleswar Maharaj met his Sadguru Shree Bhausaheb Maharaj at his own place Jamkhandi...

“No sooner did he see his Sadguru than he experienced ecstasy and joy reigned in his soul. Consequently, he received a spiritual initiation from Bhausaheb Maharaj. After getting initiation, in no time he started practising...Upon fulfillment of his austerity, he attained the Self. On the instruction of his Sadguru, he started initiating people into spiritual life. There were many enlightened souls who came to his feet just for the sake of his love and God realization.”<sup>19</sup>

The fourth and most well-known disciple on this branch of Bhausaheb’s lineage is Professor R.D. Ranade (also known as Rambhau, Gurudev and Gurudeo by his disciples.) He was born in Jamkhandi, Bijapur and died in Nimbai, near Solapur, Maharashtra.

In *R.D. Ranade and His Spiritual Lineage*, there is an account of his being saved from drowning by his friend Kallu Bokhare, who later brought Ranade to be initiated by Sri Bhausaheb.<sup>20</sup> One could say that he was saved from drowning twice by his good friend!

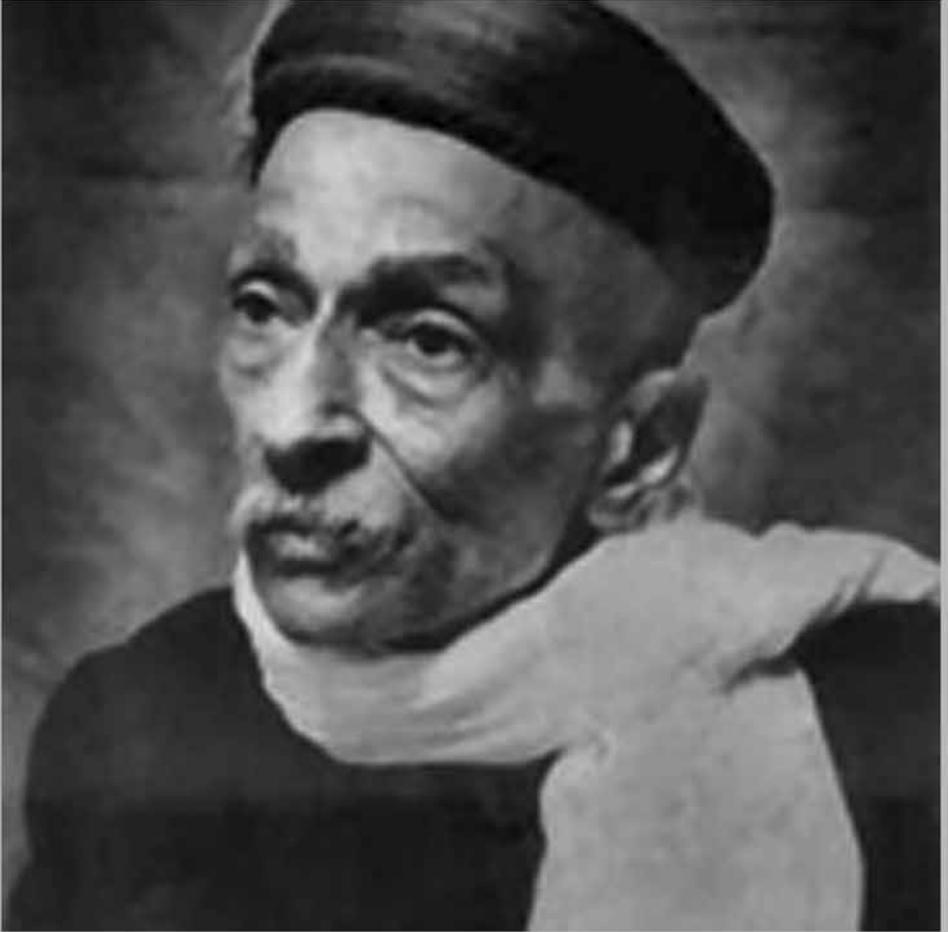
Ranade had his share of troubles in life, the loss of a child, his wife and his mother. He also struggled with health problems for much of his life. “Though he was fighting his own life-long disease from 1909 till the end of his life in 1957, he cared for and struggled for the highest good of all those who approached him with humility and surrender.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Girimalleswar Maharaj. <https://www.facebook.com/397390450626370/posts/ii-shri-samartha-sadguru-girimalleswar-maharaj-iibiographyshree-samartha-sadguru/409824006049681/> Retrieved on 02.05.2022.

<sup>20</sup> Op. cit., Date V., p.135.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.138.



Gurudeo R.D. Ranade

And, “He developed great dispassion and renunciation towards the end of his life and used these qualities to deepen his spiritual practice.”<sup>22</sup>

He had to resign his post at Fergusson College and was without any job for three years but his devotion grew ‘abundantly’. When his mother and his wife both died, he kept on practising and saying to God, “You and I shall now live together.”<sup>23</sup>

He was a philosopher and scholar of Indian mysticism, writing meticulous books on Indian mystics and their philosophy with informative comparisons to the great mystic traditions. He articulated the teachings of Jnanadev, Nirvrittinath, Eknath and Muktabai, as well as skillfully detailing the teachings of Tukaram. He taught at Willingdon College, Sangli, and later at Allahabad University, and retired as Head of Department of Philosophy and Vice-Chancellor of Allahabad University. Despite his life as a busy professor, administrator, philosopher and writer, he maintained a rigorous meditation schedule and placed great emphasis on his experiential meditation on the Name which his guru, had imparted to him. Though an erudite scholar, Ranade was grounded in practical spiritual mysticism.

He describes mysticism in his ‘Original Preface’ to his *Mysticism In India – The Poet Saints of Maharashtra* thus: “Mysticism denotes that attitude of mind which involves a direct, immediate, first hand intuitive apprehension of God. When Mysticism is understood in this sense, there is no reason why it should be taken to signify any occult or mysterious phenomena as is occasionally done. It is an irony of fate that a word which deserves to signify the highest attitude of which man is capable, namely a restful and loving contemplation of God, should be taken to signify things which are incomparably low in the scale of being. Mysticism implies a silent enjoyment of God. It is in this sense that mystical experience has often been regarded as ineffable.”<sup>24</sup>

This quote by Ranade is quite interesting to me because while researching this article I came across numerous descriptions of the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.147.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.147.

<sup>24</sup> Ranade, R. Original Preface. *In Mysticism in India: The Poet-Saints of Maharashtra* Albany: State University of New York Press. 1983. p. xiii.

meditation experiences of Amburao, Sivalingavva, and even Ranade himself, describing photisms, visions of Vaikunta, and stars, after periods of intense meditation. The descriptions seem to indicate the meditators accepted them, not in a symbolic way, or metaphorically but matter of factly. I am perplexed by this and wonder if these were ‘lesser’ experiences, and how they fit in with the advaitic lineage of Nisargadatta Maharaj. Presumably they are normal stations on the Way, because they were not given undue importance by those who experienced them.

Just as many visitors to Nisargadatta’s mezzanine floor seeking advaitic teachings might have struggled with the importance of devotion, Ranade too, struggled with the idea of bhakti and how the devotional could be compatible with non-duality. He was confronted with this unresolved dilemma when he visited a Sankara Math in Varanasi.

“His intellect again proved to be a powerful instrument for him afterwards in solving a great philosophical problem before him, namely, as to how it is that the no-dualistic philosophy of Sri Sankaracarya could be compatible with devotion to a personal God [*ishtadevata*].

“During his visit to Banares he happened to hear in the Math of Sankaracarya, the song of devotion, *Bhaja Govindam*: ‘Be devoted to the Lord Govinda – a lesson in grammar will not save you when the death is at hand.’ This gave him the impetus to make a thorough study of Indian philosophy and mysticism as taught by the saints of India.”<sup>25</sup>

Again, in Ranade’s ‘Original Preface’ he states, “It must be remembered that Sankara did not neglect Bhakti but absorbed it into his absolutistic scheme. If Sankara’s movement is not mystical in its aim, we do not understand what it is.”<sup>26</sup>

Professor Ranade met Professor Woodhouse and Annie Besant who recognised his high calibre but he declined to join them in the world-wide Theosophical Society movement. The *Silver Jubilee Souvenir* says, “But there was, on the other side, the hope of realizing God by means of silent meditation on His Name, as instructed by his

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<sup>25</sup> Date, V., Summit at Nimbai. In *R.D. Ranade and His Spiritual Lineage*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan; Jodhpur: Adhyatma Sahitya Vikas Sanstha. 1982. p.134.

<sup>26</sup> Op. cit., Ranade, p.15.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

Guru, Bhausahib Maharaj of Umadi. With intellect, will and courage he could set aside all the temptations which Theosophy offered him then.<sup>27</sup>

Instead, he created 'The Academy of Comparative Philosophy and Religion' in Belgaum, Karnataka, South India. Professor Ranade was one of the great lights of India, making the mystic teachings of India available to the world through his profound experience and study of the great works of the poet saints of Maharashtra and Karnataka. In his comparison of Western Philosophy with Eastern Philosophy, and of European mystical traditions (including Greek) with those of India, Ranade was one of the early exponents of the 'perennial philosophy'. Unfortunately, the scope of this article doesn't allow a fuller discussion of Ranade's explorations into philosophy and mysticism.

A living tradition continues in Maharashtra due to the disciples of Bhausahib, Amburao and R.D. Ranade, with centres and temples which actively function with a rich tradition of guru bhakti, meditation and Nama Yoga. In the next chapter we will look at Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj, who refined the practice and created what he called the Bird's Way, a direct enquiry into the truth. ▲

*(To be continued)*

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<sup>27</sup> Op. cit., Date V., p.134.

# The Navnāth Sampradāya and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

## Part Four

CATHERINE WEISS BOUCHER

Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj was a seminal figure in the modern Navnāth tradition of Maharashtra. He revitalised the tradition and set it on a new course consonant with the rapid changes in modern Indian society, both cultural and religious. He pushed the possibilities of what the tradition was capable of doing for its young adherents and created a new wave of gurus who disseminated the teachings beyond the boundaries of Maharashtra and Karnataka.

He was born in 1888 in a village near Solapur in Maharashtra, which is the largest city of southern Maharashtra known for its textile industries. The chief deity of the city is Shri Siddheshwar. He had little schooling probably due to poverty and lack of facilities. The Preface to Sri Siddharameshwar's *Master Key to Self-Realization* affirms that he was a bright young man. "He did not study much at the school level but he was very intelligent, clever and smart in all his behaviour. He

In 1971, a transcendental experience launched the author's spiritual practice and she was introduced to the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi. In January 1978, she was graced to sit at the feet of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. In 2002, she did a study of *Navnath Sampradaya*. Sri Nisargadatta still guides her life.

was always very straight forward and spoke with a thoughtful idea. He retorted his answers to every question with a full meaning. At the age of 16, even though he was premature to work, he took up the job of an accountant (*Munim*) in a Marwadi firm in Bijapur.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1906 he met the Saint of Umadi, Sadguru Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj and was initiated into the Navnāth tradition. Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj had established the Inchegeri Sampradāya in 1903 and emphasised devotion to the guru and mantra meditation as the way to purify the mind and experience *ātma sākṣatkāra*, that is, ‘direct sight of the Self’. It was Siddharameshwar Maharaj who took the path one radical step further and set in place the principles on which the Inchegeri Sampradāya is best known today.

Later, when he became established as a guru in his own right, Siddharameshwar Maharaj travelled widely giving lectures. He was a powerful speaker and such was his impact that a circle of disciples soon gathered around him. He is said to have initiated many people. He knew Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati, and Kannada. He attained *mahāsamādhi* at Bombay in 1936.<sup>2</sup>

Returning to our story, Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj died at Inchegeri in 1914 and in 1918, Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj, along with four other disciples of Sri Bhausaheb decided to renounce the world. He joined his brother disciples and went on tour popularising their guru’s teaching.<sup>3</sup> He then got the idea “that one should go beyond meditation, because meditation is an initial stage to Final Reality. Brother disciples disagreed with Shri Siddharameshwar Maharaj saying that their Master Shri Bhausaheb Maharaj has not told them so. He agreed with them, but reiterated, ‘Okay! Can one not go beyond that?’”<sup>4</sup>

He made the decision to embark on the path he had envisaged alone and returned to his home at Bijapur. He constructed a raised platform

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<sup>1</sup> Maharaj, S. Shri Sadguru Siddharameshwar Maharaj’s *Master Key to Self-Realization*. 1994. Bombay: Shri Sadguru Siddharameshwar Adhyatma Kendra. p.v.

<sup>2</sup> Dabade, K.B., *The Sociology of Religion: a Case Study of Nimbargi Sampradaya*, Mangala Publications, 1998. p.98.

<sup>3</sup> Op.cit., Maharaj, S. Shri Sadguru Siddharameshwar, *Master Key to Self-Realization*. p.vi.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.vi.

like a minaret (*buruj*) and performed intense continuous tapas for nine months. “Since his Master had taught him only meditation there was no alternative for him to find out the way to attain the Final Reality without meditation. His efforts were finally rewarded and his Master blessed him. He then explained that one can achieve the Final Reality via *vihangam mārḡ* (the bird’s way) which is by thinking. Ignorance has come by hearing over generations. Only by hearing and practicing from the teachings of the Master and thinking it over, just like the bird flies from one tree to another, one can attain Final Reality very fast. This is the shortest way to achieve the Final reality...”<sup>5</sup> This ‘thinking’ is the fine discernment and discrimination of the real from the unreal, which will take a sincere aspirant to the realisation of their true Self-nature. The sampradāya was evolving again.

Even though within the sampradāya, all castes and *jatis* (those whose occupations are traditional to that group) were accepted, it was not always that way outside of it. The fact that Sri Siddharameshwar was a Kunbi <sup>6</sup> disturbed some Lingayats. K. B. Dabade reports that, “Shivappa, a disciple of Siddharameshwar Maharaj, once paid a visit to Siddhagiri Math. He went to Siddhagiri without wearing a ‘Linga’ even though he was a Lingayat. The present pontiff asked Shivappa regarding this. Shivappa replied that his spiritual teacher has given him Sukshama Linga and that has to be worn by him internally. On hearing this reply, the present pontiff made an inquiry about Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj and met him at Incheḡiri.

“In the course of argument and discussion with Sri Siddharameshwar all the doubts of the present pontiff were clarified and the present pontiff, a *Lingayat Jangam*<sup>7</sup> accepted Sri Siddharameshwar – a Kunbi by caste – as his spiritual teacher.

“Once a procession was taken out in which Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj was made to sit in a *palaki* (palanquin). A Siddhagiri *Lingayat Jangam Mathadipati* acceptance of a Kunbi as his spiritual teacher and his procession in Palaki were strongly opposed by some orthodox

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> The great Marathi saint and poet Tukaram was also one too, and referred to himself as a *shudra*.

<sup>7</sup> The *Jangam* or *Jangama* are a Saivite order of wandering religious monks. They are the priests or gurus of the Lingayats.

people. The present pontiff at one stage was prepared to even to quit the Kaneri Math and the position of the *Mathadhipati*.<sup>8</sup> Later, he was able to convince his opponents that in real spiritual world, there was no discrimination in the name of caste, class, sex, age etc.”<sup>9</sup>

Sri Siddharameshwar believed that the Truth should be transmitted in simple, straightforward language. He used examples from daily life. He went beyond the teachings of his own guru, in order to make it ever more accessible to the common man. From 1920<sup>10</sup> to 1936 he shared his way with disciples. He encouraged inner renunciation and took a non-dual approach:

“This world is like a dream and hence in this dreamworld, whatever is good or bad, Dharma or Adharma, merit or sin, morality — are of no consequence for the awakening of the Self. And therefore renunciation of both auspicious and inauspicious, good and bad, is necessary to get the knowledge of Self.”<sup>11</sup>

In taking Shri Bhausaheb’s teaching, what Sri Siddharameshwar called ‘The Ant’s Path’ or the slow way, and making it the more efficacious ‘The Bird’s Way’, he began to use forms of enquiry, somewhat akin to Sri Ramana Maharshi’s Self-enquiry (*ātma-vicāra*). Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj, in *Master Key to Self-Realization*, he says:

“Everyone should begin the search for this ‘I’ at his own centre if he is keen to search it out. This ‘I’ will never be found outside of us. In every human being this ‘I’ or ‘ego’ sense of ‘mine’ and possessions is filled up to the brim. All the action in the world is carried out on the strength of this ‘ego’ and sense of ‘mine’. The theorem is taken for granted by all human beings, but the totality of action can be carried out even without this ‘ego’ or this sense of ‘mineness’”.<sup>12</sup>

In this chapter, Sri Siddharameshwar makes a systematic search for the ‘I’, enquiring into whether we are the body or not, with great logic

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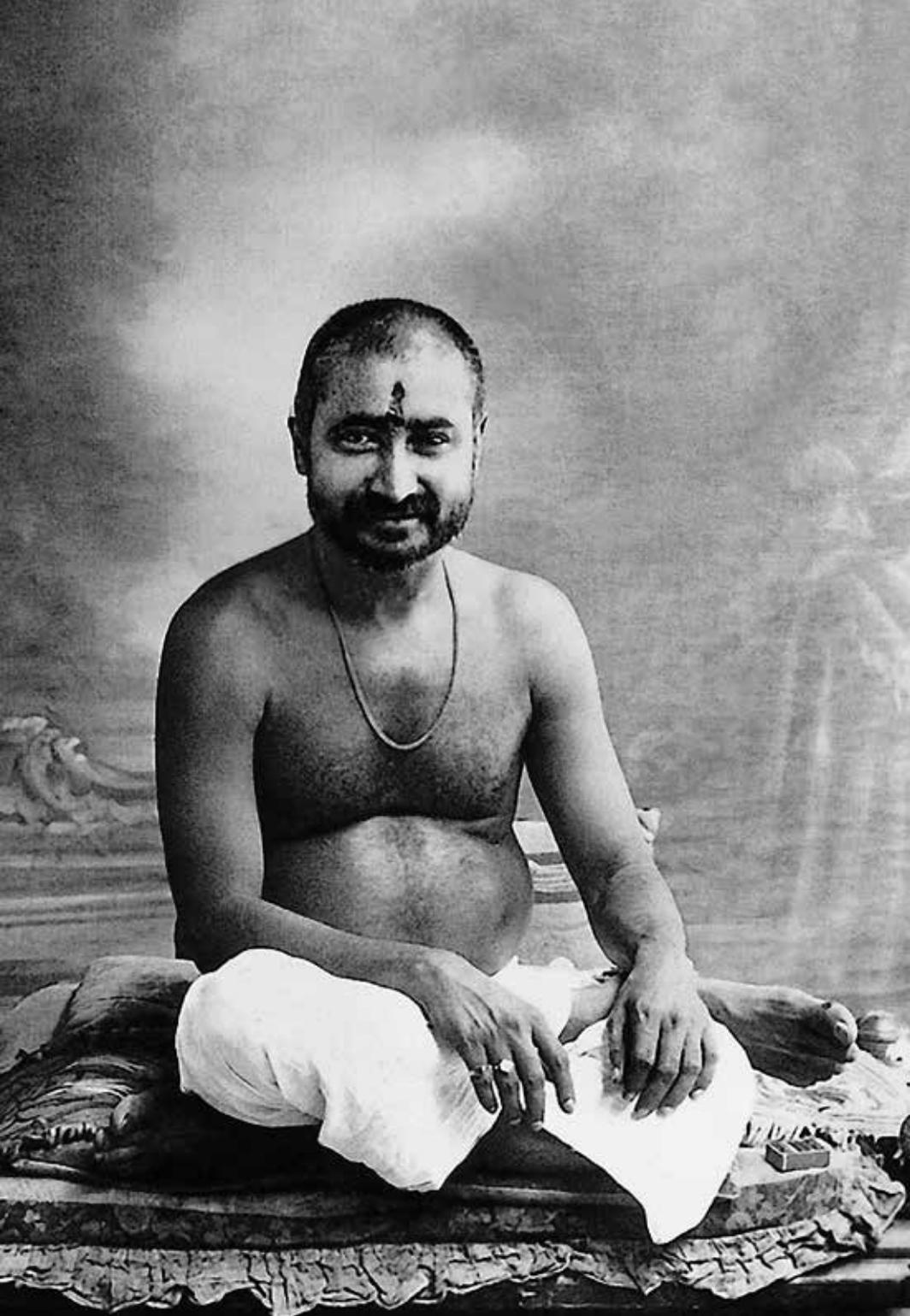
<sup>8</sup> *Mathadhipati* literally means ‘a ruler of a monastery’.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit., Dabade, K.B., p.100.

<sup>10</sup> <https://selfdefinition.org/nisargadatta/Siddharameshwar-Maharaj-Core-Teachings.pdf> 8/25/18

<sup>11</sup> Op.cit., Maharaj. S. Shri Sadguru Siddharameshwar, *Master Key to Self-Realization*. p.9.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Chapter II, “Investigation of the Four Bodies in Search of the ‘I’”, p.18.



Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj

and experiential verification. Step by step he helps the reader to examine his or her direct experience: “We have state above thus ‘I’ am is not any part or limb of the gross body they are all ‘mine’. But the maxim goes, where ‘I’ does not exist, there does not exist anything which can be called ‘mine’”.<sup>13</sup>

Having had this experiential grounding in enquiry, the disciple of Sri Siddharameshwar had questions about how to go about one’s apparent life. Sri Siddharameshwar goes on to show his disciples how they can carry on their life, take care of their duty without a sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’, saying:

“However, if the aspirant understands (intellectually), which is easier than experiencing the self, he [then] raises a question: ‘After the knowledge of the self is attained and the possessive pride of the body and mind is left behind, could the worldly duties be performed?’, the Sadguru, to console him answers, ‘Dear one, even after realising the utter uselessness of body and mind, one can establish a household and have children, without bringing in the pride of the body and the mind. These both can be looked after very well. All the relevant duties one did earlier, could be diligently performed.’”<sup>14</sup>

He then goes on and illustrates how a nurse will lovingly but dispassionately take care of her charge, or a manager the property of which he is responsible.<sup>15</sup> Household life then can be an opportunity to become firmly selfless and detached.

In the end one cannot be separate from the Absolute. Sri Siddharameshwar says:

“Whichever actions are being done by your gross body, whatever dreams or desires, ideas or doubts have crossed your mind, all these happen for the sake of this God and in order to please Him. If you recognise this much your work is done. All of you are doing something through your body or mind. If you say, ‘We do not want to do it’, you cannot stop from doing it; but whatever you do, the doer and enjoyer of all your deeds is only Hari. This fact alone must be recognised in every movement.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.25.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.25.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.54.

This becomes a practice in itself, without separating from life, without controlling it, but proceeding with the understanding that every dream and action happens in and for the Absolute. By opening to this practice, one does not have to physically renounce to stand in the Absolute. There is no place in mind, or body where the Absolute does not prevail.

Sri Siddharameshwar says: “When an aspirant has no doubt of any kind left in him and he achieves knowledge of the Self, he becomes free. Though true, as yet he cannot experience the glory of real liberation. Richness is one thing, but the joy of the status after getting rich is another thing. In the same way, unless a feeling of Oneness of All comes to the *Dnyani* [*jnani*], his knowledge does not develop or spread out, like a stingy rich man’s wealth, and he cannot get the bliss of Liberation while alive...Even if one achieves the knowledge of Self, unless one experiences a feeling of oneness with all, fearlessness does not come his way while ‘Full bliss’ is only ‘Fearlessness’. In quality, Fear is a concomitant of Duality. Fear is a very great impediment in the way of bliss arising out of liberation. So after achieving Self Knowledge, the aspirant should worship the *Paramatman* in the way explained above. Thus, dry knowledge gets moistened with devotion. A *jalebi* (kind of sweet) which has been fried in ghee, becomes juicy and sweet when it is fried and put in the syrup of sugar. In the same way, the *Dnyani* gets fullness of life through devotion after the knowledge.”<sup>17</sup>

His own transmission of Truth was simple and systematic. He was able to transmit to his disciples how to discern the Absolute from the body and the mind. We can gauge to some extent the greatness of a teacher by his or her *sishyā-s* (disciples). By this measure Siddharameshwar was a giant to have produced gurus such as Sri Ganapatrao Maharaj Kannur, Sri Muppin Kaadsiddheshwar Maharaj, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj and Sri Ranjit Maharaj, all of whom made an impact that is still felt today both in India and the rest of the world.

*Master Key to Self-Realization* is a collection of teachings of Siddharameshwar which were collected by a disciple. The *Master Key* contains teachings derived from Siddharameshwar and Ramdas

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.62.

and approved by Siddharameshwar himself. Recently, *Master Key to Self-Realization* and *Master of Self-Realization* have been combined in a single book. *Master of Self-Realization*, a collection in two volumes of his talks, was taken down by Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, when he was an aspirant himself. A third book, *Amrut Laya: The Stateless State* is a collection in two volumes of other talks given in satsang. A disciple, Mrs. Dungaji, was able to translate these important books into English. These books preserved Siddharameshwar's wisdom which was imbibed by his disciples, passing this beautiful Truth on to future generations of sincere seekers.

There is a good description of what it was like to be around Siddharameshwar at that time in an interview of Ranjit Maharaj in 'Meeting Siddharameshwar' on the Inner Quest website:<sup>18</sup>

"He was giving daily sermons for one hour. He was not going to many places, because he never wanted fame. So, he was coming to Bombay, going to Bijapur and Sholapur, and nearby there is another place called Bagewadi. In these four places he was giving his sermon from the books of Knowledge. In Marathi, there is *Dasbodh*, written 400 years ago by Ramdas Maharaj. That is a book in our lineage and on that book he was giving lectures when he was in Bombay, for one and a half months or two months of the year. The sermons were everyday in the evening, from quarter to seven to quarter to eight. And then, the bhajans followed, which we did at night. After singing bhajans, we returned home.

"So, for about one and a half months, or two months he was staying in Bombay. He was also spending the same amount of time in Sholapur. The same knowledge was taught everywhere. He was speaking in a very simple Marathi language. His motto was, 'Complicated words are not required, as it is beyond the reach of the human mind.' So, he was giving very simple examples of daily life so that we could easily understand.

"He used four books to teach us. One book was *Dasbodh*, another was *Yoga Vasishtha*, another was Ecknath's *Bhagavad [Gita]*<sup>19</sup> and

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit\\_interview.htm](http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit_interview.htm)

<sup>19</sup> That is, the *Sri Eknathi Bhagawat*. It was not a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* but on the eleventh volume of the part of the *Bhagavata Purana* also known as the *Bhagawat Mahapurana*.

the fourth was *Sāchara* [*Sadachara* or *Sadchara Anusandhana*], attributed to Sankaracharya. He began with the knowledge from Ramdas Swami's book, *Dasbodh*. Then, for renunciation, he used the *Yoga Vasishtha*, in which Rama was in a state of humiliation and then his Master, Vasishtha gave him knowledge so that he became Lord Rama. Otherwise, he was a son of a king. Then, he used the *Gita*, which describes the whole life of Krishna and what he taught to his disciples. That was written by Ecknath<sup>20</sup> Swami, who was a great realised person. 'Ecknath' means 'Lord is One only'. So, Ecknath is the Master who is One.

"He has written many historic stories about Krishna, and there are so many fights as well. Siddharameshwar Maharaj told us to try and understand the deeper meaning of fighting. What is fighting? What is the meaning of fighting? What is karma? What are reactions? All this is contained in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

"And, finally he used Shankaracharya's book. It describes how a person stays in his life after understanding and renouncing. He has so nicely used Shankaracharya's *Sāchara*, which shows how a realised person lives, how he takes his life and how he understands what Final Reality is, what thoughtless Reality is. All these topics are covered."<sup>21</sup>

When I came to visit Nisargadatta Maharaj, after a few days there, he took me downstairs to his kitchen and gave me a copy of the *Master Key to Self-Realization*. At that time I was not focused on the teachings of Siddharameshwar, and didn't understand how important this gift was although his influence was all around me: in Nisargadatta's reading of *Dasbodh*, in the complete devotion to his Guru Siddharameshwar, in Nisargadatta's powerful emphasis on our questioning our own direct experience while in discourse with the guru, at his insistence that we ask him questions.

Yes, I saw the large silver altar, and picture of Siddharameshwar but didn't realise that Siddharameshwar was the foundation of the exquisite elucidation of the Truth which I was hearing from Nisargadatta. Nisargadatta's transmission sprang from

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<sup>20</sup> He is also known as Eknath.

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit\\_Interview.htm](http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit_Interview.htm) According to another source.

Siddharameshwar. In the introduction of Vol II *Master of Self-Realization*, Nisargadatta writes:

“Blessed are those who were lucky enough to listen to the discourses which were like showers of nectar from the mouth of the Sadguru Shri Siddharameshwar Maharaj, who was the embodiment of this Supreme Knowledge, *Vijnana*.”<sup>22</sup>

Siddharameshwar transmitted the truth to other disciples who awakened too. Some became gurus, established ashrams and spiritual centres of their own, some abided in the Absolute and did not choose to function as gurus.

I have seen photographs of gatherings of Siddharameshwar’s devotees, looked upon disciples with beatific countenances, and never knew their names. However, I have been graced to have met three of Siddharameshwar’s disciples, Nisargadatta Maharaj, Bhainath Maharaj and Ranjit Maharaj. In Part V, I will go into greater detail regarding their association with Siddharameshwar and Navnāth Sampradāya. ▲

*(To be continued)*

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<sup>22</sup> S. S, Siddharameshwar (2009). *Master of Self-Realization: An Ultimate Understanding: Spiritual Discourses of His Holiness Sadguru Siddharameshwar Maharaj*. USA: Sadguru Publishing, pg. 232.

# The Navnāth Sāṃpradāya and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

## Part Five

CATHERINE WEISS BOUCHER

In the last chapter, we looked at the great Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj who became the lineage holder of the Navnāth Sāṃpradāya, and revitalised the Incheḡiri Sāṃpradāya/Nimbargi Sāṃpradāya in the 20th century.<sup>1</sup> Siddharameshwar has been referred by some as a ‘super guru’ because he was the *sadguru* of several prominent sages of the 20th century, who have had a profound impact in transmitting Advaita Vedānta. Best known of these, particularly in the West are Nisargadatta Maharaj and Ranjit Maharaj. There is also Kadasiddheswar Maharaj and Ganapatrao Maharaj who had a major influence in Maharashtra and Karnataka states of India.

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<sup>1</sup>The Navnāth Sāṃpradāya began to be called Nimbargi Sāṃpradāya since the advent of Nimbargi Maharaj (1789-1885) who came from Incheḡiri.

In 1971, a transcendental experience launched the author’s spiritual practice and she was introduced to the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi. In January 1978, she was graced to sit at the feet of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. In 2002, she did a study of *Navnath Sampradaya*. Sri Nisargadatta still guides her life.

Over the years, I have seen photographs of Nisargadatta Maharaj, celebrating holy occasions (*saptah-s*) with other disciples, and honouring their guru, Siddharameshwar. I recognized some, and now can recognize more when I look at those photos. I noticed a certain quality about these disciples that marked them out as different. Some appeared radiating an awareness, awakened perhaps, or at the least, were in a state of unshakable peace or bliss. Who were these disciples?

K.B. Dabade writes, “Some of the prominent disciples of Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj are: Ranchod Maharaj, Karwar; Gurupadashwar Maharaj, Basavan Bagewadi; Sadananda Maharaj, Goregaon, Bombay; Dhondopant Maharaj, Solapur; Nisargdutt Maharaj, Bombay; Nirbhidananda Maharaj, Bombay; Sadguru Kadasiddheshwar Maharaj, Siddhagiri muth near Kolhapur; Sadguru Datt Maharaj, Agra; Balakrishna Maharaj Dingar, Ali Nasik; Taisaheb Maharaj, Amadosi; Ranjit Maharaj, Bombay and Ganapatrao Maharaj, Kannur.”<sup>22</sup>

While I have searched books and the internet for mention of many of these accomplished disciples, I have found information about just a few: Dhondopant Maharaj of Solapur,<sup>3</sup> Sadguru Kadasiddheshwar Maharaj of Siddhagirimuth, Ganapatrao Maharaj of Kannur, and Ranjit Maharaj of Mumbai.

In this Part V, I shall include Bhainath Maharaj of Mumbai, as he was always described as Nisargadatta’s *gurubhai* (I can only assume that he too was a disciple of Siddharameshwar, even though I do not see him in the list above). I have not focused on Nisargadatta himself, as I will write more about him in Part VI.

I have had the blessed good fortune to meet three of them: Nisargadatta Maharaj, Bhainath Maharaj and Ranjit Maharaj.

When I visited Nisargadatta Maharaj in 1978, I noticed there was someone who came to his *satsang* and was given special deference. Later I found out that this gentleman was also a sage, called Bhainath Maharaj, whose family name was K.A. Sabnis. He was referred

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<sup>2</sup> Dabade, K.B., *The Sociology of Religion: a Case Study of Nimbargi Sampradaya*, Mangalore, Mangala Publications, 1998. p.99.

<sup>3</sup> There is a Marathi website, which I was able translate a little online into English, and could discern that he indeed was a member of the Sampradāya as there were many references to the lineage and the word Hinchgiri. The website is: <http://dhondopantmaharaj.org/>

to as Nisargadatta's *gurubhai* (guru brother). Whenever Bhainath showed up at Nisargadatta's mezzanine *satsaṅg* room, or elsewhere, Nisargadatta made sure that he was comfortably seated and showed proper respect. As an example, during a speech to be given at a spiritual centre, Nisargadatta waited until Bhainath was seated before he would speak to the assembled people. Nothing seemed to start without Bhainath being shown this deference, so I began to wonder who he was.

One evening during my Mumbai visit, I was invited to dinner at Nisargadatta's son-in-law, Mr. Hate's home, and Bhainath's nephew was also there at dinner. He informed me that Bhainath would be willing to meet with me in person. There was also mention that Bhainath spoke fluent English (something Nisargadatta did not). The nephew agreed to set up an appointment for noon the next day to meet and speak with Bhainath.

Later that night, I had second thoughts about doing this, because shortly after meeting with Nisargadatta Maharaj, he had asked me, "Are you going to roam about?" I had been contemplating a visit to Tiruvannamalai, but wasn't sure if I wanted to leave his side, when Nisargadatta said this to me; I took this not as a question but as a command. I didn't want to go anywhere due to the injunction that I believed Nisargadatta had given me. So the next morning I raced over to the house where Bhainath lived and tried to cancel my appointment with him. Bhainath invited me in and said to me in English, "The truth is very simple: You are not the body and the ego is unreal."

After this, I went to the morning *satsaṅg* with Nisargadatta, where I recounted the incident and he laughed after hearing about my dilemma and visit with Bhainath, and said that I was free to see anyone.

I always wondered about the relationship that Bhainath and Nisargadatta had. There was such extraordinary care, deep love and respect from Nisargadatta towards Bhainath. In researching this article I found some wonderful writing about the time Nisargadatta and Bhainath spent together in the years shortly after the *mahāsamādhi* of Siddharameshwar Maharaj. This appeared in a piece called *Meet the Sage*, which was excerpted online:

"From 1941 onwards he came in a close contact with his brother disciple, Sri Bhainath Maharaj. Everyday they usually used to go

to Girgaum Chaupati [beach in Bombay] for a walk after the shop hours. They were engrossed for hours together in their discussion, the subject matter of which was nothing else but spiritualism. In those days of the Second World War, there used to be a blackout every night. Sometimes even curfew hours were on, due to communal riots and house-fires. Close by, country bombs used to explode on the open streets. Braving such tense atmosphere and unmindful of the rain or the cold winds, these two Guru bandhus were engrossed for hours together in spiritual discussions on the Chaupati sands or the Chaupati bandstand or sitting on the footsteps of a closed shop or standing at the corner of N. Powell. It was not uncommon that when they reached home it was two or three hours past midnight. Their daily routine mundane duties, however, did not suffer on that account.

“...Sri Maharaj was much spirited and clear-cut in his talks. Sri Bhainath Maharaj had, therefore, usually to play the role of a listener. Commenting on his calm habits Sri Maharaj once said to him, ‘You are indeed very cool like Lord Vishnu. Look at me! I am like the fiery Lord Rudra...These long and subtle talks on spiritual matters helped both. This nightly spiritual fire was continuously on for 25 years.’”<sup>4</sup>

During my visit to meet Nisargadatta, the fact that Nisargadatta functioned as guru and Bhainath did not, intrigued me, given that Bhainath spoke fluent English and Nisargadatta did not. Why, if he spoke fluent English did he not transmit the truth? I learned later that not all of Siddharameshwar’s awakened disciples functioned as gurus, and some came to that function later in life. Some had been given the authority to initiate others via mantra initiation, through direct injunction or mystical vision.

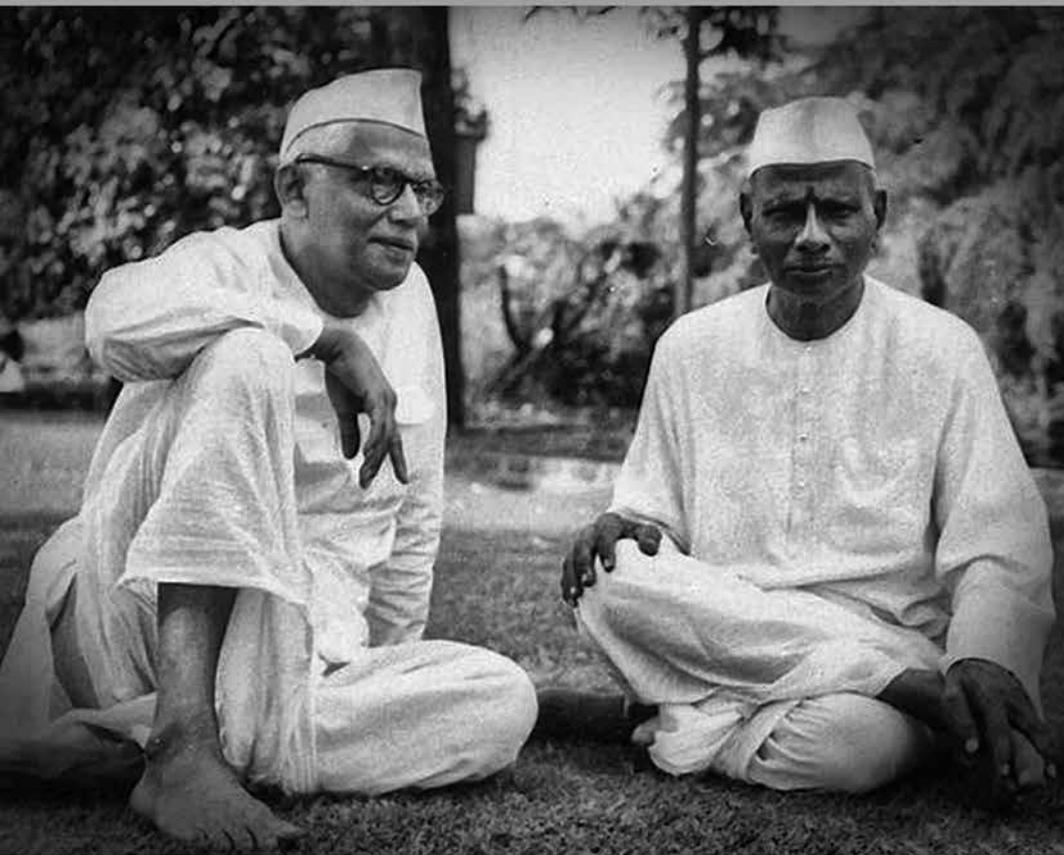
Nisargadatta Maharaj answered a question in Chapter 83 in *I Am That*, which pertains to this subject:

“Q. Does every knower of the Self become a Guru, or can one be a knower of Reality without being able to take others to it?”

“A. If you know what you teach, you can teach what you know. Here seership and teachership are one. But the Absolute Reality is beyond both. The self-styled Gurus talk of ripeness and effort, of merits and achievements, of destiny and grace, all these are mere

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.inner-quest.org/NisargadattaMS.htm> Retrieved 04.04.2015.



Bainath Maharaj and Nisargadatta Maharaj

mental formulations, projections of an addicted mind instead of helping, they obstruct.”<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps my concern about why some *gurubhais* were functioning as a guru and some were not is overlooking the obvious, which Nisargadatta pointed out so eloquently, of seership and teachership being one.

Ranjit Maharaj (1913-2000) also spoke about the guru in his talks recorded in the volume *Illusion vs. Reality*.

“MAHARAJ: When Siddharameshwar Maharaj was there, there were no cassettes. The Master must be a complete Master, and he was a complete Master. He gave everything and that was his greatness. Many teachers don’t give the final understanding. One has to go beyond knowledge, where the Knowledge becomes Ignorance. That stage he explained to us and made us understand.”<sup>6</sup>

In finding these teachings from two of Siddharameshwar’s disciples so consistent in their pointing beyond any duality, I could feel the flow of wisdom in the lineage. This is a truly powerful transmission which has been and is available to those who are open to it. At the time I did not know much about Ranjit. I met him once years later in the 1990s when his disciples brought him to California. He spoke fluent English, and was clear and straightforward. He transmitted the Absolute beyond any duality. However, he had not always functioned as a guru, although he had been awakened for many years.

He did not want to become a guru since he felt that having disciples would be a bondage. He was also shy and had great respect for his senior *gurubhais*. However, in 1983, at the age of 70, when faced with a request from Yeshwant Rao Maharaj, a son of Shri Siddharameshwar Maharaj, to give mantra *dīkṣā* to his daughter-in law, he could not with all due respect say no. And after that precedence, he could not refuse requests and ultimately he agreed to actively carry on the spiritual lineage. The number of his disciples then multiplied in Maharashtra and then abroad.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Maharaj, N. (2008). *I Am That: Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj* (p. 422). (M. Frydman, Trans.). Durham, North Carolina: The Acorn Press.

<sup>6</sup> Maharaj, R. (2009). *Illusion vs. Reality: Dialogues with Shri Ranjit Maharaj* (First ed., Volume I & II, p. 42). Lexington, Kentucky: Sadguru Publications.

<sup>7</sup> <http://lifepositive.com/ranjit-maharaj-the-stateless-state/> and <http://sadguru.com/ranjitmaharaj.php> Retrieved on 27.04.2021.

Ranjit recounted, “I started to teach in 1983 because my Master’s granddaughter-in-law wanted me to give her a mantra. She said to me, ‘I want a mantra from you.’ If I didn’t give her a mantra, then I’d be faithless to Siddharameshwar Maharaj. So by my Master’s order and grace I started to teach, and at this moment I teach you.” [laughs]<sup>8</sup>

After Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj left in his body on 8th of September 1981 there was still an influx of disciples who visited Nisargadatta’s *Adhyatma Kendra* at 10th Ketwadi Lane and some of them then made their way to Ranjit Maharaj’s apartment. In the 1990’s Ranjit started giving *satsang* abroad. Because of his fluency in English he was able to directly transmit the truth to them. Ranjit also translated into English lectures by Siddharameshwar based on *Dasbodh* which is called *Amrutlaya*.

“Keeping with the teachings of his guru, Siddharameshwar, his emphasis was i) understanding through dialogues and studying teaching ii) mantra initiation and iii) worship.”<sup>9</sup>

But let’s go back to the beginning, Ranjit Maharaj was born on 4th January 1913 into an affluent Gujarati family. His father’s name was Chunnilal and his mother’s name was Vidya Gauri. When he was twelve he met Siddharameshwar. He had been very devoted to worshipping Krishna but gave it up after this encounter. He became devoted to Siddharameshwar and spent some time as a *sannyasin* at the request of his guru.<sup>10</sup>

“In 1934, at the age of 21, Shri Ranjit Maharaj and his co-disciple Shri Devidas Maharaj took initiation to monkhood. As per his Master’s words ‘Live with the conviction that the whole world is my family,’ Shri Ranjit Maharaj and few other co-disciples who had taken monkhood

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit\\_Interview.htm](http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit_Interview.htm) Retrieved 27.04.2021.

<sup>9</sup> In the Preface of *Illusion vs. Reality*, Vol.I. In the Introduction to *Illusion vs Reality: Dialogues with Shri Ranjit Maharaj* (First edition) Sadguru Publishing, 2009, pg.1, Robert Wolff writes, “The three main aspects of the teaching are: 1) understanding through the dialogues, and studying the teaching 2) mantra meditation, and 3) worship.” “Worship of the Master is the pinnacle of Maharaj’s teaching and is a common theme that is found throughout his dialogues.” p.1.

This book has been previously published in a different form that was originally transcribed and edited by Robert Wolff in the years 1999 and 2000.

<sup>10</sup> See *Illusion vs. Reality*. Op.cit.,p.1. <http://www.sadguru.com/ranjitmaharaj.php> and [http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit\\_Meeting.htm](http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit_Meeting.htm)

had travelled to places like Patan, Viramgaum, Khandwa, Delhi and Haridwar. He had many experiences in his monkhood and followed his Master's teachings to the core, 'Without devotion knowledge is lame; without knowledge mere dispassion is blind – therefore there should be oneness across devotion, knowledge and dispassion.'

"Later Siddharameshwar Maharaj instructed them to be dispassionate about dispassion and renounce dispassion too. He then made them renounce the ochre cloth of a sannyasin and told them to live a normal life by surrendering all that they have or experience at the holy feet of Sadguru and to be a trustee of all that they had surrendered."<sup>11</sup>

In another interview, Ranjit further discusses this issue of renunciation: "Many people dressed up as saints and went out, for four months, six months, eight months – as they liked. After some time Siddharameshwar told them, 'Now take off those saffron clothes and be a simple man as you were before.' Nobody will say all these things. Many Masters are there, but they never say, 'Take off those saffron clothes.' He said, 'Be a simple person. Understanding has come to you, right over you now. Why should this show be there?' So if you understand that way, then you can easily throw off the clothes also. People want saffron clothes so then they can say, 'Oh, they bow down at my feet at once!' Ego remains always in the mind. So, he said, 'Renounce the renunciation now...'"<sup>12</sup>

After meeting his guru, Ranjit Maharaj continued living a normal life. Completing his schooling, he tried his hand at various jobs, including that of a bar manager, before becoming an accountant. He lived in the same small one-room apartment for over 58 years.

Another disciple, Ganapatrao Maharaj (c.1909-2004) was initiated at the age of thirteen by Siddharameshwar, lived as a *brahmachari* and then chose the renunciate path. While he practised meditation and devotional songs, he at the same time studied for a B.Sc degree from Fergusson College, Pune. He practised diligently during this time, having completely renounced worldly pleasures and distractions. Ganapatrao was spiritually advanced at a young age which is evident in the following anecdote.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.sadguru.com/ranjitmaharaj.php>

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit\\_Interview.htm](http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit_Interview.htm) Retrieved 06.06.2015.



Ranjith Maharaj

“Once Shree S.S. Siddhameshwar Maharaj was having discourses for three days, delivering the message ‘you are Atman, who is Chit (supreme consciousness) incarnate. It is you who puts life in this inert body’. When the discourses were over, in order to test how well the disciples had imbibed the message, Shree Sadguru Maharaj asked the audience ‘can anyone infuse life in a dead body and make it stand up?’ The listeners were dumb-struck upon hearing this unusual question. Nobody dared to stand up and say ‘I can’.

But young Ganapati boldly stood up and voiced ‘Sadguru Maharaj, I have infused life into this lifeless body and have made it stand up as per your instructions’. Shree Sadguru Maharaj was extremely happy that he had such a wonderful disciple in Ganapati. Ganapati was just 14 at that time!”<sup>13</sup>

Siddhameshwar is reported to have said to Ganapatrao’s spiritual sister, Rukminibai, “He is my true heir and successor to spread Knowledge!”<sup>14</sup>

Ganapatrao, like Ranjit, spoke about Siddhameshwar asking his disciples to become *sannyāsin-s* for a year.

“During a *Saptah* in Inchgeri in 1933 A.D. Shri Siddhameshwar Maharaj said to his disciples “I am ordering you to take *Sanyasa* for one year. Who is ready to take it up?” Immediately upon hearing this, Shri Maharaj stood up and said he will do it. After this 7-8 other disciples also came forth. The *Sanyasi* disciples were instructed to follow the following rules: 1. Wear ochre robes; 2. Meditate all the time; 3. Not touch money; 4. Not ask for anything from anyone and if necessary, beg for food from others, and that too only once a day, in the afternoon; 5. Carry only articles that are absolutely essential, these could include a few spiritual texts. It was a test by fire for the disciples.

The disciples chose the bank of river Krishna and carried out *tāpas* (penance) for a year, strictly as instructed. When Ganapati came to Bijapur after completing the *tāpas* wearing ochre robes and considerably thin, his parents were pained to see him so frail,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Maharaj, Ganapatrao, *Easy Steps to Self-Realisation*, Dani, V.R. (Trans.), (First ed). Kannur, Karnataka: Adhyatma Bhandar. 2009, p. xviii.

but Shri S. S. Siddharameshwar Maharaj was immensely pleased seeing the aura around the young Ganapati.

“Shri [Ganapatrao] Maharaj continued his *sādhana* with renewed determination for the next 14 years at different locations like Sitimani (on the bank of river Krishna), pilgrim centers like Audumbar and hill station Mahabaleshwar. He stayed there for months together submerged in his intense *sādhana*, and reached the final goal and became a *Siddha* or a realized being.”<sup>15</sup>

One of the issues I had wrestled with, when I first explored the Navnāth Sampradāya, was the desire to prove that it was primarily a householder path. In observing the awakened disciples of Siddharameshwar, I found that we cannot define it as such because this transmission transcends such dualities. Just as we are pushed to go beyond the duality of knowledge and ignorance, we are pushed beyond the dualities of renunciation and householder life. Siddharameshwar encouraged some of his disciples to take up a renunciate life; some were encouraged to remain as renunciates, like Ganapatrao Maharaj; some actually came to him as renunciates, as in the case of the 26th Kadasiddha Muppini Muni; still others practised for a while and then were told to transcend physical renunciation like Ranjit Maharaj. Whatever the external stance, all were encouraged to transcend duality and be internally renounced, and just as importantly, renounce the concept of renunciation.

It also became evident that there is a tradition in the Navnāth Sampradāya to create centres that offer the local communities temples and commemorative *samādhi*-s for the *sampradāya* gurus to function. These centres are located in both Maharashtra and Karnataka: Kannur, Nimbargi, Inchehiri and Siddhigiri.

Ganapatrao Maharaj (1909-2004) has been involved in uplifting whole communities, providing a straightforward transmission and at the same time providing for the basic needs of the people. It is advaitic involved engagement from the perspective of self-knowledge. He says in his *Easy Steps to Self-Realisation*, in the section titled ‘Karma Yoga and Sanyasa Complement Each Other’:

“The Upanishadic sages and the Acharyas like Adi Shankara give importance to sanyasa, while the *Bhagavad-Gita* and *Yoga-vasishtha*

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<sup>15</sup> <http://shantikuteer.in/ganapatrao-maharaj/> Retrieved 28.04.2021. See Also <https://archive.ph/slKho>

give primacy to Karma-yoga. Those who uphold the supremacy of Karma-yoga do not reject sanyasa and resting exclusively in jnana state leading to moksha. According to Lokamanaya Tilak, after obtaining jnana, one can renounce worldly activities and stay in the bliss of Brahman or even better, continue the worldly life after obtaining jnana. While upholding sanyasa after jnana, Adi Shankara does not mind if the Jnani chooses to carry out karmas for the sake of uplifting the common man. However, he must take care that the karma he is engaged in does not affect his jnana.”<sup>16</sup>

Ganapatrao was reported to have awakened by age of twenty-three and in later years, other disciples came to him for spiritual guidance. He translated the Marathi *Dasbodh* of Swami Samarth Ramdas into Kannada. He wrote *Sulabh Atmajnana*, which became a classic and was translated into Marathi, Hindi and English in which it is titled *Easy Steps to Self-Realisation*.

To give you a sense of the directness and simplicity of Ganapatrao’s teaching, here are his Ten Commandments for Spiritual Progress:

*The Daśa Sūtra*

1. Blessed is he whose sadhana is centered on that which excludes ‘I’.
2. Why do you roam about with a lost look while you are the Brahman!
3. Listen, child, this is the secret: You yourself are the Brahman. Do not entertain any doubt in this regard.
4. Be aware of what is ‘I’ and ‘mine.’ With this awareness give up both and Experience Brahman!
5. One must be aware one is Brahman and Merge oneself in the bliss.
6. By thinking of which memory fades away, yielding the ground to Awareness. Only those who have experienced It will know this. To others this is an empty delusion.
7. First one must realize Brahman, then one must remain as Brahman.
8. In this hide-and-peek game of Brahma-vidya, one must remain as he is without becoming anything.
9. When I’m here, Ram is not to be found! Now Ram is very much here, I’m seen nowhere!

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<sup>16</sup> Op.cit., Maharaj, Ganapatrao, 2009, p.243.



Ganapatrao Maharaj

10. Without bringing any images in-between instantly take off to what you are!<sup>17</sup>

These ten pointers given by Ganapatrao Maharaj are direct and unambiguous. They are a straightforward affirmation of the active intent of Advaita. At once deep and profound, the truth expounded by Ganapatrao is approachable, accessible and sensible. I am struck by verse two which asks, “Why do you roam about with a lost look while you are the *Brahman!*” and wonder if this was a statement made by Siddharameshwar to his disciples. What I took to be Nisargadatta’s injunction for me to not roam about (I thought about looking for other spiritual experiences), is part of something larger, altogether. Ganapatrao exhorts us not to roam about in ignorance when we are already That! This explanation illuminates that moment for me, and ties me into an enquiry, springing from the ongoing tradition of the Nimbargi/Inchegiri Sampradāya.

So, some disciples renounced and then renounced the renunciation, others stayed as renunciates and some came as renunciates, which leads us to Kadasiddha Maharaj, 26th Muppin Muni.<sup>18</sup> He was anointed as the 26th Mathadheepati of the (Siddhagiri) Kaneri Math, Kolhapur, Lingayat Parampara, in 1922 at the age of seventeen. The Muppin Muni has a long history, and a close connection to the Navnāth /Nimbargi Sampradāya because Nimbargi Maharaj was the 22nd Muppin Muni, and then Bhausahab Maharaj, the 23rd. I do not quite understand the flow from there as Kaadasiddheshwar (also known as Kadasiddha) received in 1935 the full transmission at the feet of Siddharameshwar Maharaj, after which he returned to the Math and resumed his responsibilities including renovation of the Kaneri Math and renaming it the Siddhagiri Math.

“He was a master in yoga and mastered all the difficult asanas, such as the Kumbhak, which he could maintain for nine minutes. It is said he could meditate for over ten hours a day, and from 1922 to 1935 he mastered all aspects of the Hindu spiritual tradition and philosophy. He

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<sup>17</sup> Op.cit., Maharaj, Ganapatrao, 2009, p.xxii.

<sup>18</sup> The Muppin Muni Math was established in the 7th Century by Revan Nath who was the eighth of the original nine saints (Navnath). Due to his compassion and powers people called him Kada Siddha, *kādh* meaning jungle.

met his philosophical and spiritual guru, Siddharameshwar Maharaj, in 1935 and was given a new outlook on deep philosophical concepts. It is believed that he attained self-realization or *Gyan Drishti*. Kadsiddheshwar Maharaj taught that concepts of sects and religions are an illusion and that everything is unified. To realize this unity is the simplest form of *Vidnyani Avastha*.<sup>19</sup>

K.B. Dabade, in 1998, explains further:

“Sri Sadguru Samrtha Sri Muppin Kadeshwar Guru Sri Virupaksha Kadeshwar Swami is the present head and considered to be 26th pontiff of Kaneri Muth, Siddhagiri. According to one version the 22nd or 23rd Pontiff is said to have initiated the saint of Nimbargi... The birth place of the 26th pontiff is Lingsur, Gadinglaj taluk of Kolhapur District. He had education up to the 4th standard. Marathi is his mother-tongue and he also knows Kannada. He is said to have initiated more than one lakh aspirants.”<sup>20</sup>

There is also account of the devotional practice carried out there, “Daily four times Pooja is performed. To the left of the main shrine there is a big hall where the photos of some saints of Nimbargi Sampradāya are placed including those of Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj and the saint of Umadi.”<sup>21</sup>

I noticed in collecting information about the disciples that there was similarity in the form devotion to the guru was expressed. It brought me back to the devotional practices of *pūjā*-s and *bhajan*-s that I observed while sitting in Nisargadatta’s mezzanine. In looking through the photos of devotional activities and accounts, pilgrimages and festivals connected with the teachers of the *sampradāya* one can see a common thread of devotion and strong social interaction.

Ranjit Maharaj for example, insisted on participating in the four *saptah*-s (gatherings) each year connected with the *sampradāya*: *Guru Purnima* and SadguruShri Siddharameshwar Maharaj’s *Punyatithi* at Bagewadi; *Rathsaptamisaptah* at Pathri; and *Diwali Saptah* at

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.gurusfeet.com/guru/kadsiddheshwar-maharaj> see also <http://www.gurusfeet.com/blog/shri-samarth-sadguru-muppin-kadsiddheshwar-maharajsiddhagiri-mathadhipati-kaneri-kolhapur>

<sup>20</sup> Op.cit., Dabade, K.B., 1998, p.100-1.

<sup>21</sup> Op.cit., Dabade, K.B., 1998, p.101.

Mumbai. Disciples were expected to sing all four prescribed *bhajan*-s every day as they contained the essential teachings and reinforced their individual practice.<sup>22</sup>

Ranjit Maharaj said,

“...In our lineage, there have always been bhajans, and Siddharameshwar was also singing bhajans. He sang them up to his last moment, you follow. Then, what happens? Nothing remains for you. So, you no longer want anything from him. He never wanted anything from his Master, but still why did he worship him? To honour him! To do service in honour of his Master, in honour of Reality. Only a brave man can do service. He wanted nothing. He taught us the Truth and we accepted what he taught because it is absolutely true. So the only thing that one can do after understanding is to honour Him. What else is worthwhile? Tell me! You are He. Now, what to do?”<sup>23</sup>

The life positive website shares: “A disciple reported, ‘In spite of its very strong Advaita nature, bhakti, devotion towards one’s guru, is an important part of the teachings handed down from Bhausaheb. Both Ranjit Maharaj as well as Nisargadatta Maharaj showed exemplary devotion to their master. Despite preaching non-duality even between master and disciple, Ranjit Maharaj never failed in the performance of the daily puja and four bhajans as taught by Siddharameshwar. According to Kishor Chopda, this extreme bhakti was not a path to attain realisation, but in fact arose from there.’”<sup>24</sup>

For Ranjit Maharaj as for other accomplished gurus of the tradition, *bhajan*-s were not only prayers requesting guidance and blessings but a celebration.

“After liberation, one naturally worships his Master. Once you have understood, what is left for you to do? There is nothing to do except pray to the one who has shown you Reality. You feel so thankful, knowing that the Master is in your Heart. You and he are one.”<sup>25</sup>

Ganapatrao too, speaks about honouring the gurus through awakening in a chapter called ‘The greatest service to the Sadguru’:

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.sadguru.com/ranjitmaharaj.php>

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit\\_Interview.htm](http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit_Interview.htm)

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.lifepositive.com/ranjit-maharaj-the-stateless-state/>

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit\\_Meeting.htm](http://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit_Meeting.htm)

“The greatest service by which one can serve the Sadguru is to put into practice what he has taught. With full faith in him one must follow his instructions in letter and spirit. What is dear to the guru is *atma-bodha* or knowledge of Self-realisation. The guru naturally gets attracted strongly to a disciple who is constantly aware of his teachings and tries to follow them. The disciple gives up his ego completely and experiences the supreme state of bliss of Self-realisation. Such a disciple is very close to the Sadguru.”<sup>26</sup>

There are wonderful teachings from the disciples of Siddharameshwar and of course, many sincere seekers are familiar with Nisargadatta’s works, starting with *I Am That* and the many transcriptions of his talks. Ranjit Maharaj also has had some of his talks recorded and there is a two volume book called *Illusion v/s Reality: Dialogues with Shri Ranjit Maharaj On Stateless State*.

As I bring this portion to a close, I feel a great welling up of gratitude that I have been directed to explore and experience the teachings of the *gurubandhus* (guru disciples) of Nisargadatta. Had I not been requested to take up this joyous task of writing about the Navnāth Saṁpradāya’s link to the Nimbargi/Inchegiri Saṁpradāya and the wealth of spiritual teachings about the Absolute, I might not have read the words of Ganapatrao and Ranjit Maharaj. Their firm conviction in the non-existence of the ego, and their continued exhortation to venerate the Master makes a powerful and unmistakable impression.

Part VI will focus on Nisargadatta and how he lived, practised and functioned as a master of the Navnāth Saṁpradāya, even though he and the other masters of his lineage remind us there is no one there to do so. To quote Ranjit about this:

“The Master takes you to that place where there is no one to understand anything. There is no knowledge nor ignorance and so understanding has no meaning. Let everything appear within That, but say that it is not true. There is no need to change anything because it doesn’t exist. When you forget the sense of the world, which is nonsense, then you will know the real sense and Reality opens up to you.

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<sup>26</sup> Op.cit., Maharaj, Ganapatrao, 2009, p.17.

“The Master is the greatest illusion because all that he says with full heart and frankness is false. But the false words that the Master tells you can make you reach Reality. Speaker and listener are both false. If one reaches Reality, then they become realised.”<sup>27</sup>

And Ganapatrao Maharaj echoes this sentiment:

“Jnana: After all the explanation, the guru asks the disciple, ‘After giving up the body, mind, ego and others in this manner does anything remain?’ ‘Nothing remains, Sir,’ the disciple answers.

“The guru has another question, ‘You who knows that nothing remains, have remained, isn’t it?’

“The disciple answers, ‘Yes, sir. I remain as *jnana*. Henceforth, I will always remain aware that the awareness is me.’”<sup>28</sup>

In the next section titled ‘Be as you always are’, Ganapatrao Maharaj continues his elaboration of the teaching:

“The guru concludes with the observation, ‘You say, “I am awareness” in response to my question. In your natural state you have no reason to assert that you are awareness. So give up this need for stating your own existence and simply be as you always are. This state is the Real you this is the real state of every Jiva. It is Para-Brahma, the bedrock of everything.’”<sup>29</sup> ▲

*(To be continued)*

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<sup>27</sup> [https://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit\\_Meeting.htm](https://www.inner-quest.org/Ranjit_Meeting.htm)

<sup>28</sup> Op.cit., Maharaj, Ganapatrao, 2009, p.105.

<sup>29</sup> Op.cit., Maharaj, Ganapatrao, 2009, p.106.

# The Navnāth Sampradāya and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

## Part Six

CATHERINE WEISS BOUCHER

When I started to write this history of the Navnāth-Nimbargi Sampradāya, there were two ideas in mind. One, to show how many of the gurus were able to apparently live as householders, and yet become fully awakened; and two, I also wanted to explore how a completely non-dual path that transcended the relationship of God and devotee or guru and disciple, could also be devotional. As a Westerner, I had been oblivious to this and didn't understand how *nāma yoga* (the initiation by bestowing a mantra) could possibly be used in the context of *jñāna yoga* or that devotion to the guru could be considered identical to devotion to Consciousness. During this journey, which started in 2002 and was returned to (by grace of the Absolute, I believe) in 2014, I was pointed to a transcendence of these concepts and dualisms: householder-renunciate, *bhakta-jñāni*,

In 1971, a transcendental experience launched the author's spiritual practice and she was introduced to the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi. In January 1978, she was graced to sit at the feet of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. In 2002, she did a study of *Navnath Sampradaya*. Sri Nisargadatta still guides her life.

even knowledge-ignorance. This is because from the point of the Absolute there are no such dualisms which apply and certainly not to this amazing lineage of awakened masters of the Navnāth Sāmpradāya.

This chapter is the return for me, to the apex teacher, Sri Nisargadatta. He is the inspiration for my meandering from Sri Dattātreyā and the mists of antiquity to the present time, via a lineage which kept refining the transmission from guru to disciple, becoming more direct and expedient. For those who are seeking the truth from this lineage, Nisargadatta says in a talk transcribed in *Beyond Freedom: Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*:

“You should have an intense desire to seek the Truth. Only then will the results be quick. The outcome of japa will be according to the strength of your conviction and the extent of your faith. My Guru did a lot of penance and long spiritual practice before he got this knowledge. But without my having to do any penance or spiritual practice, he bestowed this knowledge upon me. I am not dependent upon this world or this universe; this world and this universe depend upon Me. How do you recognize me? What identity do you allot to me and how do you judge me? With what identity do you judge yourselves? You entertain the idea that you are going to have different births. I don’t believe in any such stories. I know ‘I’ never was. That ‘I Amness’ was never there for me. I am the unborn state.”<sup>1</sup>

This abidance as the unborn has a beginning story, which Nisargadatta did not want to tell especially as he knew it was illusory but his ‘history’ has been gathered by various individuals, including members of his immediate family.

Sri Nisargadatta was born on Hanuman’s birthday, in March 1897; he was given the name, Maruti, in honour of Hanuman. His father worked as a servant and then later bought some land and became a small-time farmer. The introduction to *I Am That* says, “Shivrampant [the father of Maruti] died in 1915, leaving behind four sons and two daughters. Income from the farm would not suffice and in 1916 the eldest son had to leave for Bombay. Maruti followed his eldest

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<sup>1</sup> Maharaj, N. (2009). *Beyond Freedom: Talks with Sri Nisargadatta* (First ed.) (M. Jory, Ed.). Mumbai: Yogi Impressions. p.26.

brother in 1918.”<sup>2</sup> In 1924 he married Sumatibai and with her became the parents of three daughters and a son. He started out as a clerk in an office but that did not suit him temperamentally and he soon took to petty trading. He opened a *bidi* shop (shop for hand-rolled coarse cigarettes) and began selling them. He became prosperous. He had a friend named Yashwantrao Bagkar, an intelligent seeker of truth. They would have discussions and one day his friend brought him to meet his Sadguru, Sri Siddharameshwar.

Although Maruti was moved by Sri Siddharameshwar, he felt the teaching was beyond him.<sup>3</sup> Maruti was given a mantra initiation, which is totally in keeping with the Navnāth tradition, and instructions on how to meditate. His intense practice really started to develop between 1933 and 1936.<sup>4</sup> Sri Siddharameshwar died in 1936 and evoked in Maruti a strong feeling of renunciation which he then acted upon.

He abandoned his family and *bidi* businesses and set off for the Himalayas.<sup>5</sup> Srikant Gogte and P.T. Phadol, in the introduction of *I Am That* say of this, “On his way to the Himalayas, where he was planning to spend the rest of his life, he met a brother-disciple, who convinced him about the shortcomings of a totally unworldly life and the greater spiritual fruitfulness of dispassion in action.”<sup>6</sup> When he returned he found that out of six shops only one remained, but that was enough for the sustenance of his family, Maruti became Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, devoting all his free time to meditation on his guru’s instruction. He actually explained how the name came to him in *Consciousness and the Absolute: The Final Talks of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*, edited by Jean Dunn:

“Q. How did Maharaj get the name Nisargadatta?”

“M. At one time I was composing poems. Poems used to flow out of me and, in this flow, I just added Nisargadatta. I was revelling in composing poems until my Guru cautioned me, ‘You are enjoying composing these poems too much; give them up!’”

<sup>2</sup> Maharaj, N. (1973). *I Am That : Conversations with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj* (2nd ed.) (M. Frydman, Trans.). Bombay: Chetana. Part I, p.xxvii.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.xxvii.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.xxvii.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.xxviii.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.xxviii.

“What was he driving at? His objective was for me to merge in the Absolute state instead of revelling in my beingness.

“This was the way I realized knowledge, not through mental manipulation. My Guru said, ‘This is so’, and for me, it was finished!”<sup>7</sup>

In the book *Nothing is Everything: The Quintessential Teachings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*, which was compiled and translated by Mohan Gaitonde, Nisargadatta speaks with a visitor regarding having faith in the Sadguru, and how he realised the truth:

“Visitor. How did you realize yourself?

“Maharaj. I had full faith in my Guru. I abided in his words. Rest of the happening was spontaneous.

“V. Can we know your Guru’s words?

“M. ‘You are all that exists. Presently, you are the consciousness. God, Ishwara etc. are the names of what you are.’ These words were enough to change me completely.”<sup>8</sup>

So, after a relatively short time he awoke to the truth. People would line up at the shop to ask spiritual questions and later, when his son took over the business, he began to hold regular satsang (association with the truth).

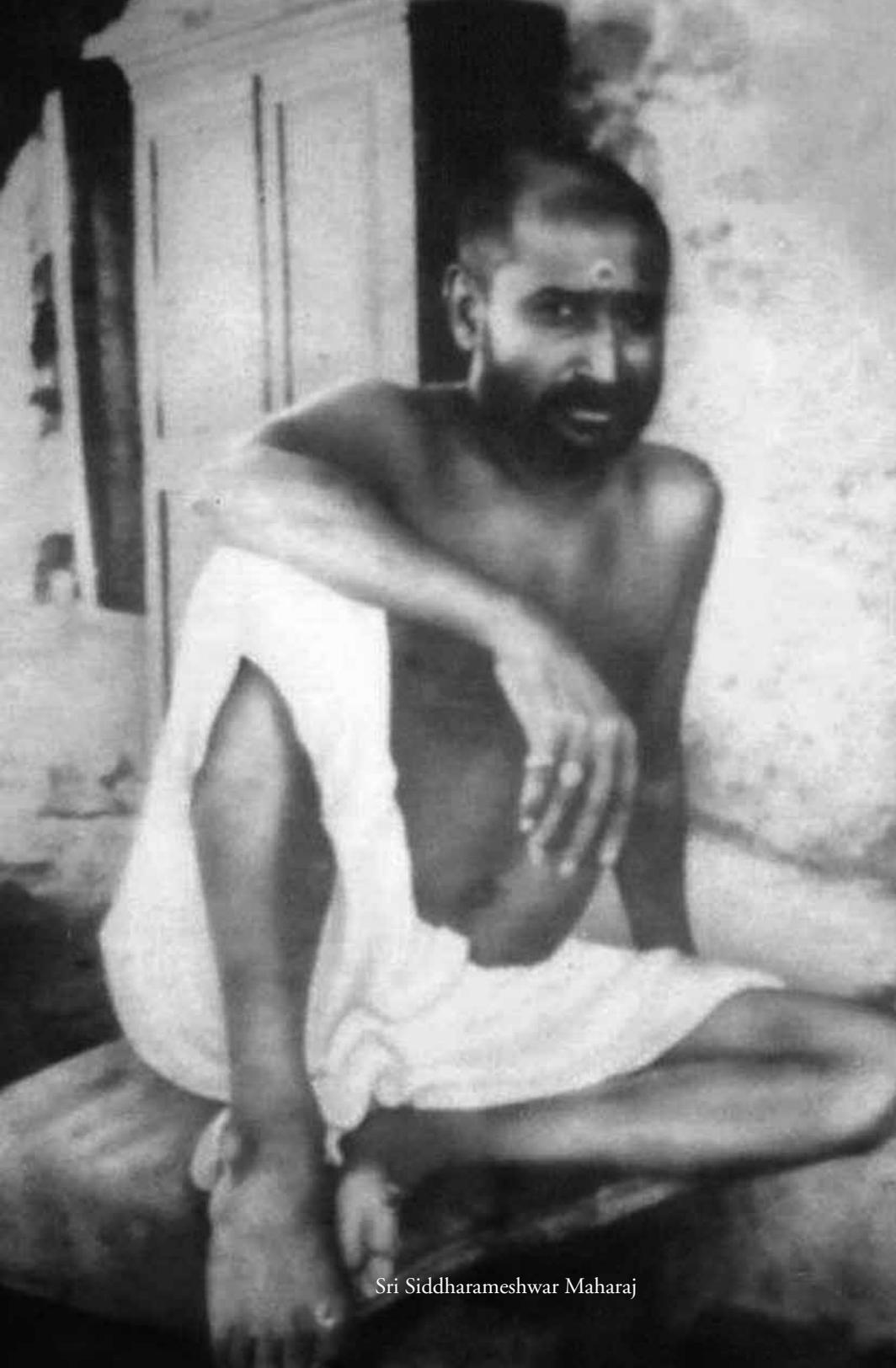
The transformation begun with Sri Siddharameshwar, of taking a more relative, moralistic path of meditation and then making it a more direct and piercing transmission, was finished by Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj himself. Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj’s transmission became a beacon of non-dual liberation the world over and in the few years after *I Am That* was published, Westerners were attracted to his apartment on Ketwadi Lane. Although there were many cerebral and erudite Western people who came to see him seeking clarification, he was always the simple but cuttingly direct, illuminated sage.

Up until I had met Sri Nisargadatta, my concept of a Self-realised sage was that of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, who was it seemed

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<sup>7</sup> Maharaj, N. (1994). *Consciousness and the Absolute: The Final Talks of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj* (First ed.) (J. Dunn, Ed.). Durham, NC: The Acorn Press. p.7-8.

<sup>8</sup> Maharaj, N. (2014). *Nothing Is Everything: The Quintessential Teachings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*. (First ed.) (M. Gaitonde, Trans.). Mumbai: Zen Publications. p.41.



Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj

completely removed from worldly life. Meeting Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj on a noisy street in Bombay shattered most of my concepts about what a realised sage was like or how my life could be utilised to become enlightened. I was wholly made welcome and invited to ask questions and discourse with him. I noticed early on that I was not the only woman present. Both Indian women and Western women alike were more than welcome to sit at His feet. There were some very sharp ladies there and I believe that this is also in keeping with the Navnāth tradition of inclusiveness.

Sri Nisargadatta reached out with great compassion to the many confused travellers who arrived at his door. He showed great patience and restraint in his dealings with them, or should I say, us. He would explain what the world was like for him, or more precisely that there was no one to experience a non-existent world. He freely gave of his freedom: an example of this is given in *I Am That*, Chapter 38:

“Question: Give us at least some insight into the content of your mind while you live your daily life. To eat, to drink, to talk, to sleep — how does it feel at your end?”

“Maharaj: The common things of life I experience just as you do. The difference lies in what I do not experience. I do not experience fear or greed, hate or anger. I ask nothing, refuse nothing, keep nothing. In these matters I do not compromise. Maybe this is the outstanding difference between us. I will not compromise. I am true to myself, while you are afraid of reality.”<sup>9</sup>

It is not that being a householder was advocated as a path, but in the context of the Navnath Sampradaya of Sri Nisargadatta, being a householder was not an obstruction; rather it was an opportunity for renunciation in action. Maharaj was not enamoured with being a householder, he did not take himself to be any designation whatsoever. On the other hand, he had no patience for people who had cloaked themselves in spiritual imagery; he was ruthless about tearing down all images and attachments. If he was leery of householders it was of the opportunity for attachment and ego involvement that would ensnare them. He felt that householders could discharge their duties

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<sup>9</sup> Maharaj, N. (2008). *I Am That: Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj* (First ed.)(M. Frydman, Trans.; S. Dikshit, Ed.). Durham, N.C.: Acorn Press. p.171.

with complete dispassion and compassion. In a dialogue in *I Am That* Chapter 63 Maharaj spoke about living:

“Maharaj: ...There is only life. There is nobody who lives a life.

“Question: That we understand, yet constantly we make attempts to live our lives instead of just living. Making plans for the future seems to be an inveterate habit with us.

“Maharaj: Whether you plan or don't, life goes on. But in life itself a little whorl arises in the mind which indulges in fantasies and imagines itself dominating and controlling life.

“Life itself is desireless. But the false self wants to continue — pleasantly. Therefore it is always engaged in ensuring one's continuity. Life is unafraid and free. As long as you have the idea of influencing events, liberation is not for you: The very notion of doership, of being a cause, is bondage.

“Question: How can we overcome the duality of the doer and the donee?

“Maharaj: Contemplate life as infinite, undivided, ever present, ever active, until you realize yourself as one with it. It is not even very difficult for you will be returning only to your own natural condition.

“Once you realise that all comes from within, that the world in which you live has not been projected onto you but by you, your fear comes to an end. Without this realisation you identify yourself with externals, like the body, mind, society, nation, humanity, even God or the Absolute, but these are all escapes from fear. It is only when you fully accept your responsibility for the little world in which you live and watch the process of its creation, preservation and destruction that you may be free from your imaginary bondage.”<sup>10</sup>

This dialogue illustrates how Maharaj stands beyond all concepts, even spiritual ones in the course of living life. Meditations such as this are the core of the practice of the householder.

Many Westerners came to meet Sri Nisargadatta in India, held certain preferences for living a spiritual life in India, rather than the overtly materialistic life in the United States and Europe. Maharaj would send many home to confront these issues. He felt that one was

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<sup>10</sup> Op.cit., Maharaj, N. (2008). *I Am That*, p.298.

able to realise and abide as the Self, anywhere, in any circumstance. He would push the Westerner to look deeply within his or her own circumstance as in *I Am That* Chapter 72:

“Question: ...What is it that brings me again and again to India? It cannot be only the comparative cheapness of life here? Nor the colourfulness and variety of impressions. There must be some more important factor.

“Maharaj: There is also the spiritual aspect. The division between the outer and the inner is less in India. It is easier here to express the inner in the outer. Integration is easier. Society is not so oppressive.

“Question: Yes, in the West it is all *tamas* and *rajas*. In India there is more of *sattva*, of harmony and balance.

“Maharaj: Can’t you go beyond the gunas? Why choose the *sattva*? Be what you are wherever you are and worry not about gunas.

“Question: I have not the strength.

“Maharaj: It merely shows that you have gained little in India. What you truly have you cannot lose. Were you well grounded in yourself, change of place would not affect it.

“Question: In India spiritual life is easy. It is not so in the west. One has to conform to environment to a much greater extent.

“Maharaj: Why don’t you create your own environment? The world has only as much power over you as you give it. Rebel. Go beyond duality, make no difference between east and west.”<sup>11</sup>

He wanted us to understand that we could practise and realise at home; we did not have to continue these dualisms at all. With such encouragement, Maharaj literally pushed people out the door of the satsang room. He had no desire to have an ashram; his only desire was to show people how to be as they truly are.

Having been inundated with Western seekers in the 1970s and 1980s Maharaj became both affectionate towards us and critical of our approaches. He criticised our approach and at the same time showed us the way to deal with our particular temperament in this dialogue:

“Question: Am I allowed to smoke in your presence? I know that is not the custom to smoke before a sage and more so for a woman.

“Maharaj: By all means, smoke, nobody will mind. We understand.

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<sup>11</sup> Op.cit., Maharaj, N. (2008). *I Am That*, p.352-3.

“Question: I feel the need for cooling down.

“Maharaj: It is very often so with Europeans. After a stretch of sadhana they become charged with energy and frantically seek an outlet. They organize communities, become teachers of yoga, marry, write books, or anything except keeping quiet and turning their energies within to find the source of the inexhaustible energy and learn the art of keeping it under control.

“Question: I admit that now I want to go back and live a very active life, because I feel full of energy.

“Maharaj: You can do what you like as long as you do not take yourself to be the body and the mind. It is not so much a question of actual giving up the body and all that goes with it, as a clear understanding that you are not the body, a sense of aloofness, of emotional non-involvement.

“Question: I know what you mean. I have passed some four years ago through a period of rejection of the physical; I would not buy myself clothes, would eat the simplest of foods, sleep on bare planks. It is the acceptance of the privations that matters, not the actual discomfort. Now I have realized that welcoming life as it comes and loving all it offers is the best of it. I shall accept whatever comes with a glad heart and make the best of it. If I can do nothing more than give life and true culture to a few children — good enough; though my heart goes out to every child, I cannot reach all.

“Maharaj: You are married and a mother only when you are man-woman conscious. When you do not take yourself to be the body, then the family life of the body, however intense and interesting, is seen only as a play on the screen of the mind, with the light of awareness as the only reality.”<sup>12</sup>

Maharaj is critical here, and is unerringly accurate in describing how Western spiritual aspirants behave after a dose of intense spiritual practice. He keeps pointing us to complete dis-identification. He wants us to go deeper. He does not want us to appear dis-identified, he wants us to see and be only That. He is speaking here from his own experience, how he handled being businessman, husband and the father of four.

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<sup>12</sup> Op.cit., Maharaj, N. (2008). *I Am That*, p.508.

Sri Nisargadatta also speaks a lot about desire and fear. People seem tossed about by desire and fear, even in relation to the Absolute. He encouraged people to directly look at what the Truth is and not fret unnecessarily. This actually is also found in the teaching of Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj and Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj, as well. That an inordinate amount of life's energy can be wasted by anxiety and fear is observed by Maharaj in *I Am That*, Chapter 98:

“Question: How do we learn to cut out worries?”

“Maharaj: You need not worry about your worries. Just be. Do not try to be quiet; do not make ‘being quiet’ into a task to be performed. Don’t be restless about ‘being quiet’, miserable about ‘being happy’. Just be aware that you are and remain aware — don’t say ‘yes, I am; what next?’ there is no ‘next’ in ‘I am’. It is the timeless state.”<sup>13</sup>

Sri Nisargadatta has had enough experience to know how easily one can get caught up in endless concerns, both worldly and spiritual. He puts them all to rest with his wisdom sparkling with that potent shakti with which he delivered the message. He would drill right to the heart of each questioner and shake them till they awoke. He was a tiger who knew no fear.

Maharaj communicated his direct experience to all who came to see him. He continued to live his life based on Self-knowledge. He was not enamoured by any aspect of life, he dealt with life as it was necessary, always situated in complete Self-knowledge. This spontaneous dealing with life, in full detachment and wisdom was perfectly in keeping with the transmission down through the ages. Each guru in the Navnāth Saṁpradāya transmitted the Truth in ways that those around would be able to assimilate, in ways that were in accord with the societal influences of the time.

Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj made the transmission more direct, a form of inquiry, of discrimination with more emphasis on Vedanta and its classic methods of understanding. This transmission made an impact on Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, Sri Ranjit Maharaj and Sri Bhainath Maharaj, his three enlightened disciples who lived in Bombay or as it is now known, Mumbai.

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj seemed to potentiate the transmission,

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<sup>13</sup> Op.cit., Maharaj, N. (2008). *I Am That*, p.508.



yet carried on certain accepted religious traditions, especially for his Indian disciples. He still gave mantra initiation, with the underlying point being that the mantra was more than sound; it was the Absolute Itself which could reverberate throughout life in all circumstances. He may have sometimes used these practices but always brought the seeker to the most absolute perspective. In *Consciousness and the Absolute* he answers a question regarding *nāma japa*:

“Question. I am practising *nama-japa*, is that all right?

“Maharaj. Recite the sacred name, that is all right, but the important thing is to recognize and understand what is the presiding principle by which you know you are and by which you perceive everything else. You must look at yourself, get to know yourself. The riddle of spirituality cannot be solved by your intellect. At the most, your intellect can provide you with livelihood.

“Whatever you try to become, that is not you. Before the words come out, before you say ‘I Am’, that is you. You must be concerned only with yourself. Don’t worry about anybody else. What are you?”<sup>14</sup>

Always directing the disciples towards the Absolute is evident in this conversation from the book *Nothing is Everything* that Maharaj had with a visitor:

“Question. We worship Gods like Rama and Krishna. Were they human beings just like us? If so, we can also strive to be like them?

“Maharaj. They were like you. If you call them incarnations, you are also incarnations. That is the greatness of consciousness in human form. The only requirement is its proper use under the guidance of the Sadguru.

“Question. Although the Truth is simple, some people undergo great hardships for Self-realization.

“Maharaj. If a disciple does not have any doubt about his Sadguru’s teachings, he realizes the highest in no time. But such is a rare case. Full faith in one’s consciousness works wonders. In the initial stages, people are told to chant mantra and do bhajans. They also achieve but after a long time.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Op.cit., Maharaj, N., *Consciousness and the Absolute*, p.42.

<sup>15</sup> Op.cit., Maharaj, N. (2014). *Nothing Is Everything*, p.229.

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj was somewhat of a departure from the traditional Navnāth Saṁpradāya because he came in contact with many European and American seekers. However, the Navnāth Saṁpradāya had always embraced people of different castes, classes, genders and even religions. Maharashtra is a region with a long and powerful spiritual history with many illustrious saints and sages whose message invariably had a gritty, inclusive urgency that appealed to the farmers, craftsman and traders, aside from the priests and scholars. Think of Ramdas, Tukaram and Jnanadeva.

Couple that fertile past with Mumbai which is a complex cauldron of Marathis, Parsis, Gujaratis, Sindhis, Tamils and Malayalis to name but some of the distinct ethnic groups in India, each with their own rich traditions who live in usually amiable, close contact in the tight geography of that cosmopolitan megacity. All this made for a society that is open to new ideas and just as important, had the tenacity and drive to accomplish much. In this hothouse bloomed a rare flower known as Nisargadatta Maharaj who audaciously reached out beyond the cultural, social and religious confines of his forebears.

Maurice Frydman brought Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj to the attention of the world. Although Maharaj did adapt a different mode of instruction for his Western disciples, through the question and answer format, his transmission was the same for all. The irony of a totally unlettered man being one of the most eloquent exponents of non-duality was not lost on those who came to see him. He was a perfect teacher for those who came to see him because he was accessible in so many ways. He was accessible by being in the midst of the noisiest city on earth. He was accessible in that he had freely given of himself, spiritually, while selling bidis. This free offering of himself continued unabated in his home on Ketwadi Lane. He was available because he had no pretence whatsoever and was intent on unmasking all spiritual fraud. He was available because at the heart of his detachment was unconditional love.

After Sri Nisargadatta became sick in the late 1970s, his transmission continued but he lost all patience with spiritual imagery and intellectual fencing. His later discourses are piercing and diamond-like in their ability to dismiss the disingenuous and dilettante questioner. Most of all, he truly wanted us to awaken as he had. In

## MOUNTAIN PATH

*Consciousness and the Absolute*, edited by Jean Dunn, in one of his last talks, Maharaj said:

“I do not want meek and humble disciples, I want them to be powerful as I am. I do not make disciples, I make Gurus.”<sup>16</sup>

These powerful words are a reminder of the true purpose of the Navnāth Saṁpradāya. One thing for certain, in India, the Nimbargi-Inchigiri Saṁpradāya branch of the Navnāth Saṁpradāya has taken root and flourished and this is because it is flexible and has the interests of the genuine seeker at heart. It is not engrossed in perpetuating a set of rituals or formulae but promulgates a living tradition. It is a fire that burns bright when fed with the aspirations of a *sādhaka*. Perhaps, the Navnāth Saṁpradāya will take root here in the United States and Europe, amongst those who are on fire with a secret fervour and are quietly enquiring amidst their busy daily lives. ▲

*(Concluded)*

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<sup>16</sup> Op.cit., Maharaj, N. (1994). *Consciousness and the Absolute*, p.100.