

PARAMAPUJJA GURUDEVATA SHRI KALAVATI MATA



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BELGAVI**

There are many backward communities in India. One such community called the Boharis lived in Angol, Belgaum. Until 1940's there was no hope of improvement in their poor way of living. This was partly because of society's indifference towards their needs and development. They contributed their part by accepting hopelessness, lack of will power and reluctance to change. They lived in huts with poor sanitation. They lacked sense of personal hygiene and took bath once [a](#) week. Their language was indecent. Due to lack of education and any goals in life their young ones became vagabonds. The adults indulged in drinking, gambling, and fighting for trivial reasons. Now you see a profound change in their social status. They now regularly attend the three prayer sessions in the nearby Shri [Harimandir](#) [7am-8:30am, 5:30pm-7pm and 9pm-10pm]. Since it is customary to go to prayers after [a](#) bath, clean & tidy they inculcated a sense of personal hygiene. As they started enjoying the prayers they would not miss them at any cost. If they ran out of fuel to warm the water for bath they would resort to cold-water bath. The night session of prayers kept them away from alcohol and gambling

Through the spiritual discourses and sincere prayers their reluctance to change gradually waned. They developed an awareness that God is pleased only through universal love and compassion towards all creatures. They gave up their age-old primitive way of [worship](#) involving sacrifices of animals without any hesitation. There was a radical change in their thought process, language and conduct. They became cultured in true sense with higher lofty goals in life [spiritual]. Secondly, material gains and social upliftment went with it. This is in sharp contrast to traditional education which results in great material gains but loss of higher spiritual values. This is the only reason why we see degeneration of humanity and utter chaos in the world today. No wonder sincere prayers and genuinely holy men can bring about miracles in real life, a fact to which this community bear ample testimony.

Who was the inspiration behind this incredible transformation? It was none other than a humble lady saint by name Kalavati [Devi](#), who is called by Her devotees as Param Pujya Aai or the Holy Mother. India is lucky to be endowed with innumerable great saints throughout the ages who have kept the path of [Bhakti](#) [Devotion] vibrant. This Holy Mother was one such unique saint [1908-1978]. She carried out her mission through Shri [Harimandir](#), the main headquarter in Angol, Belgaum, Karnataka State. With a remarkable ease she fostered [Bhakti](#) in the hearts of millions bringing Joy and Hope in their lives. Thus runs the life story of a great soul.

She was born to pious parents Smt. Sitabai and Mr. Shantaram Kalyanpurkar of Karwar [in Karnataka State]. In 1907, they performed special [worship](#) called "Sahastra Lingarchanam" to invoke [Lord Shiva's](#) blessings for a virtuous son. This [worship](#) concluded on the day of Durgashtmi in Navaratra. The same night Mr. Shantaram had a dream of Goddess [Durga](#) informing about Her incarnating in his family. Soon thereafter in 1908, Holy Mother was born at the auspicious time [[[Brahmi]]] [muhurta](#) on the day of Rushi Panchami in the month of Bhadrapada. She was named Rukmabai. As they had hoped for having their first child, a boy, they were a bit disheartened. As Rukmabai grew, her divine virtues started unfolding. Noticing this they overcame their initial feeling towards her and now considered themselves lucky to have such a child. Even as a baby Rukmabai had great endurance for pain. As she grew she exhibited maturity and patience unusual for her age. She had gracious manners and a very selfless nature. No wonder she was dear to all and everybody longed to have her company.

Prayers [Bhajans] were offered every evening with the participation of the whole family. When she was three years of age the family moved to a place of pilgrimage called Gokarna on the West Coast in South India. Thus the family background and the holy environment in the town were conducive to her spiritual growth. At the age of five she was able to sing bhajans in four different languages - Marathi,

Kannada, Hindi, and Gujarati. Her devotional fervor and melodious voice naturally attracted people. Hence she was frequently invited in religious functions to sing bhajans.

As a child her games differed from other kids'. She enjoyed playing with the favorite toys [[[idols]]] of different [deities](#) [[[Rama]], [Krishna](#), [Ganesha](#), etc]. At the sea beach she would make a huge lingam of [Lord Shiva](#) and would be engrossed in worshipping it for hours. Playing in water at the beach or collecting seashells never attracted her.

At the age of seven she met a great Sanyasi [monk] by name " Swami Purnananda Saraswati". She was blessed with his company for many days. He was very much impressed by her profound devotion. At the time of departing with great affection and love he presented to her as a token of his remembrance his own idol of [worship](#) of [Sri Krishna](#). He then said to her," Take to him as your beloved, share all moments of your life with Him. He will fulfill all your aspirations." He then turned to her father and said, " Your child is none other than Divine Incarnate born for spiritual upliftment of masses. She will retire from her family life and shake off all social fetters at a young age of 19. She will take to ascetism and nothing will deter her".

The idol of Sri [Krishna](#) she got, stole her heart away. Most of her daytime, she would spend around Him. She would be self-absorbed for hours in His worship. She would decorate Him with colorful dresses and ornaments. She would pluck flowers from the garden and make garlands for Him. She would invite children to join her in bhajans and would tell them stories from [Hindu](#) mythology and of great saints. Her desire to earn punya [divine merits] was so great that she would not miss a single opportunity, may it be austere religious activity, selfless service or any spiritual events in town. She very quietly performed difficult religious tasks such as "Kartik-snanam" without much pomp and show. ['Kartik-snanam is taking a dip in the holy pond early dawn in chilly cold winter months everyday]

Thus from age seven to fourteen Rukmabai laid down for herself a strong spiritual foundation.

At the age of 15 she married Sri Rajgopal Mallapurkar, a police inspector from Kadur in south Arcot district. On their way back home the newly wed couple took a break at Hubli to have the darshan of the great Saint "Sri Siddharudha Swami". The Swami blessed the couple. At the first sight of this great saint she intuitively knew that this was her Sadguru who would guide her in her spiritual quest whom she so long longed to know. Her heart overflowed with joy. In reverence she prostrated, placed her head on his feet. Tears of joy that rolled down her eyes washed the holy feet of the [Guru](#). The Guru at this time gave her the initiation in the mahamantra of '[Om](#) Namah Shivay'.

Rukmabai's role as a daughter in law in the traditional joint family was exemplary. She worked hard from early dawn to dewy eve. She did this very quietly in the spirit of service without even expecting a word of praise from anybody. Her affectionate nature and selfless service won her the hearts of the whole family. Though there were servants she always liked to do the work herself. She was kind to the servants and helped them in their work. Despite being busy she always found time for worship, prayers and meditation.

Rukmabai gave birth to her first son (Balkrishna) at the age of seventeen. At age nineteen, a month before her second confinement her husband died of a heart attack. This personal tragedy affected her [mind](#) deeply. From her childhood she always believed that Human life was given by God for realisation of the Ultimate Truth. Her married life having come to an abrupt end she was free to pursue the path so that her life would be fruitful. But how was she going to achieve concentration of mind and devotion so essential in this path with two kids to take care of as a widow. She was left with no desire to lead an ordinary life either. So she decided to end her life in the nearby well. But Divine plan was contrary to heir's sadhu (monk) appeared from nowhere and cautioned her against the attempt.

He made her aware that she had a great mission in life to be fulfilled. She was born to alleviate the sufferings of people by their spiritual upliftment. He told her to go to her Guru's ashram in Hubli after the confinement and that her miseries would soon come to an end. The sadhu soon disappeared. She was choked with emotion believing that her own guru came in that form to console her. Those words of hope pulled her through those difficult moments.

She returned home and gave away all her belongings and treasures to the poor and needy in charity. Her father then came and took her back to Gokarna. Very soon she delivered the second son (Kamlakar).

Within the first two months of her husband's death serial tragedies hit her one after other. She lost her father in law and her own dear father in succession. She became more sorrow stricken. She was disillusioned with the evanescent nature of this world. She made it clear to her family that for the sake of security in life she would neither remarry nor take education. She came to a firm resolve that she would seek the eternal support of God only.

Before her father's death she had mentioned to both parents about her decision to lead an ascetic life at her Guru's ashram. They did consent but always hoped that they would be able to dissuade her.

Couple of months after second confinement according to divine instructions she took off from her home for good. With no other belongings than the dress (sari) she wore, she arrived at her Guru's ashram in Hubli. With great affection he welcomed her saying he was waiting all the time for her. These words of love comforted her.

When her mother came to know about her whereabouts she came with some close relatives and her two small kids to persuade her to return. All the means they tried - begging, persuasion, threat failed. Even affection of her kids failed to deter her from her resolute decision. They left disappointed.

Rukamabi's ascetism was very austere which makes us creep when we read about it. She lived with bare minimum needs. Initially she managed to live on just one sari. When the Guru came to know about it he gave her a pair of saris. She restricted her food and drinks to the utmost, sometimes she went without food for a week. She used empty sacks of jute as a bed and brick as a pillow. The holy name was always there on the tip of her tongue. With all this she never lost the energy and enthusiasm for voluntary work at the ashram and Prayers. She avoided conversing with anybody unless it was really needed.

Having thus shaken off fetters of passion, disciplined her body and subdued her mind to perfectly marvelous extent she set for herself a stage for Enlightenment.

The Guru was very much pleased with her virtues such as purity of thoughts, faithfulness, zeal for acquiring divine knowledge, mature behavior, ability to cognize the essence of spiritual themes, power of eloquence, capacity to grasp and contain information and for deep meditation, detachment, dauntless sincere nature, ability to do tasks efficiently, steadfast devotion and above all fierce ascetism.

This culminated in his honoring her on the day of Dasara in 1928. In the presence of a huge congregation he gave her seat beside him on the Dais. He placed a shawl around her shoulders, gave prasadam to eat and named her 'Kalavati [Devi](#)'. He then asked her to give a spiritual discourse. She promptly responded and spoke on a hymn 'Naam Sankeertan sadhan pai sope' (meaning chanting the holy name and singing the praises of the Lord the easiest way to salvation.) for 2 1/2 hours very authoritatively everybody was spellbound with her blessed discourse.

The seed of devotion that had sprouted in childhood had grown steadily and now was ready to blossom.

One day while she was doing bhajans she became very restless and emotional with eyes full of tears longing to see God. Just as a child crying for the mother refuses to accept any toys, so was she. She wanted nothing but God otherwise life was worthless to live anymore. As Jesus said in 'Sermon on the mount', "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted", so was she mourning for God and the comfort did come. The Guru walked into her room and no sooner had he placed his graceful hands on her head, she plunged into a superconscious state (called samadhi). This was her first mystical experience of absolute union with absolute reality. She had attained Beatitudes (Atmananda- utmost divine Bliss).

Very soon the Guru informed her about his decision to give up his body. For the firm foundation of the mystical experience she had, he advised her to go into solitary retreat for six months for deep meditation. After this period he instructed her to do twelve years of Keertan Seva (spread the Gospel) touring different places. "Take joy in serving the Lord in human form" was his advice. "Know that I am with you all the time and harbor no fear" was his assurance. At the end of twelve years settle down at Angol, Belgaum. Work for the upliftment of the backward community there and invoke divine love in them. This will fulfill my promise given to my devotee residing there. As planned very soon he gave up his body.

She soon hired a small room in Hubli enough for one person to fit in. Through a few holes in the ceiling was all the light and ventilation she got. Again with bare minimum needs and food (1 cup of cooked rice with milk and two cups of water a day) she spent all the time 3 am to 10 pm in meditation, prayers and chanting the Holy Name.

At the end of her solitary retreat she visited her Guru's Ashram on the holy day of Mahashivratri. Here she accepted the invitation of Mrs. H. Narayanrao, wife of a principal in Madras to visit her home in Bangalore. Her first keertan or the discourse was held in a woman's club there. The secretary of the club made the usual enquiry of the honorarium for the services. Devi smiled and said "As per my Guru's orders I charge no fees. I am doing this as a selfless service to God However if you listen to me with full attention and excuse me for any lapses I would consider this itself a gift".

She thus moved from place to place spreading the divine love.

Once at 'Saraswati Sabha' in Madras at the end of the Keertan, she was offered a gold coin as a gift by a doctor named Keshav Pai. She again refused saying if she accepted in order not to offend him she would soon find herself in possession of enough coins that she could make a necklace out of it. It would no doubt make her popular but would be a deterrent in the service to her Guru.

Again she declined offers in Nanjangarh of Rs.75,000/- by a Lingayat grocer and another of a Laxmi Narayan temple with a private [house](#) by a childless Marwari couple in Kolhapur.

During extensive travel alone for twelve years at a young age, she faced many difficulties. The Guru rescued her all the times in the guise of a stranger either as 'Gurunath Hublikar' or 'Siddhappa Hublikar'. Thus her life bears ample testimony to the fact that He protects those who have steadfast faith in Him.

In 1938, she stayed for 6 months in Santacruz, Mumbai during which time she conducted spiritual festival on the eve of her Guru's Punyatithi (death anniversary) Mrs. M. Shivrao attended the whole programme, at the end of which with divine grace her hitherto untreatable ailment of the brain

miraculously got better. To express their gratitude they offered Rs. 2,000/- to Devi which she refused as usual.

In 1942 she concluded her 'Keertan Seva' of 12 years during which time she happened to be in Belgaum for the Ramnavami festival. At this time the above named person Mr. M Shivrao had a divine appearance in his dream asking him to present a piece of land in Angol Belgaum to Devi. He came looking for her here and told her about it. Though initially she did not accept it, she accepted it when she received similar instructions.

On this land she built an Ashram called ' Shri Harimandiram '. She compiled bhajans of different saints in a book called 'Parmartha Marg Pradeep' and taught her devotees to sing in appropriate melodious tunes. These bhajans are full of spiritual teachings by saints who have realized God. She stressed on being attentive during bhajans, grasp their meaning and bring into practice the teachings therein without which no progress could be made. As the bhajans started bringing peace, joy and contentment in their lives they realised that bhajans were not a means of escapism but a way of realizing God. She motivated countless number of people in chanting the Holy name.

There was no room for dogmatism, bigotry and fanaticism in her teachings. She accepted all religions as different paths toward the same goal. Infact she has written stories on the founders of all major religions of the world i.e. on Christ, Prophet Mohammed, [Buddha](#) and Mahavir.

To a common man she taught how to spiritualize their daily lives. In [women](#) she rejuvenated the sacred ideals of Indian womanhood. For smooth running of the family it is necessary for [women](#) to be subservient to their husband and children to their parents. [Women](#) to be subservient to their husbands should not be construed as a sign of weakness. On the contrary they wield considerable power in doing and undoing of the welfare of the family, they are asked to be subservient. She has accorded women the status of Goddess of prosperity (Laxmi). Men should always keep this in their minds and give them their due respect. She herself as a daughter in law set an example by serving her in-laws very unselfishly, unobtrusively and ungrudgingly. She salvaged many marriages in trouble. She taught that tolerance, introspection and correcting oneself is the right way to solve interpersonal problems in the family. She emphasized on regular sincere prayers as a means for bringing lasting peace and harmony in their lives. She taught parents how important it was to instill moral conscience through prayers at an early age. She formed a special prayer booklet called 'Balopasana' for children which has become very popular. She taught and showed how to use time and money efficiently so that enough time is spared to pursue higher spiritual goals. She emphasised on being mindful in all day today activities a habit that is beneficial in meditation. To all she taught dignity of labour. She had a great respect for nature and showed her devotees how to nurture nature and use its resources sparingly. No wonder she became the Saint of whole household. She preached equality of people and as such people of all caste and creed attend prayers and no distinction is made.

Just as the person who has walked in scorching sun enjoys the shade of the tree so do people with life in turmoil find the utmost peace here. The peaceful, silent and clean atmosphere impresses the visitor the most.

Having a darshan (meeting) of Aai (holy mother) was a blessed event for all. Her face was full of radiance and magnanimity. Her eyes were lustrous. She had unspeakable sweetness of expression and smile on her face. Her motherly solicitude excited the tenderest filial affection in the hearts of her devotees. Her presence was a haven. The peace and bliss from her darshan would leave a lasting impression on people.

Though illiterate (she had education only upto 3 rd grade in Kanada) she would throw a flood of marvelous light upon the obscurest corners of Indian scriptures ([Vedas](#), Puranas) and bring out fundamental principles in such simplicity and clarity that even a lay man could cognize the theme. Thus all kind of people, laypersons to intellectuals of both sexes and all ages would attend her discourses in large numbers.

Shri Harimandir is so unique that importance is given singularly to prayers. Donations and offerings (fruits, incense sticks, flowers etc.) are discouraged. Because these rituals tend to distract the mind from prayers, which become of secondary importance. The distracted mind thus fails to achieve peace, bliss and contentment, in other words the goal is missed. Even with a big crowd during Utsav (festival) people desist from merry making (eating drinking, shopping) knowing the importance of not allowing their minds to drift away from prayers. As a result no stalls spring up during such gatherings as happens in the traditional fairs in the holy places in India.

The discipline as taught by the holy mother is so commendable that even a gathering of 25,000 people is handled without any commotion or chaos and decorum maintained. Even during these festival basic amenities (toilets, drinking water etc.) are well provided and kept clean.

Holy mother toiled for the sake of her devotees till the last moment of her life. She breathed her last uttering the name of '[Krishna](#)' at an age of 70 years on 8th Feb.1978.

A samadhi according to [Hindu](#) religious tradition was constructed at the place of her burial in the prayer hall. It is noteworthy that even during this difficult period of mourning punctuality of the prayers was maintained. This was according to the teachings of holy mother to stick to prayers during all the ordeals in life.

The tradition of initiation in the Holy name (Guru [mantra](#)) by the Guru is still maintained. On certain special days the interested devotees gather and sit in front of the sanctum sanctorum of samadhi. A tape-recorded mahamantra of '[Om](#) Namah Shivay' in the holy mother's voice is played through the sanctum sanctorum. Devotees with steadfast faith have been benefited by this and they experience as if it has come from the Holy Mother herself.

Thus people by reading or hearing of her life and her teaching and participation in her Bhajans and chanting of the holy name have been able to tune their life to a higher key.

Even after the death of Holy Mother the activities in 'Hari Mandir' have been running as usual and discipline maintained. Volunteers from all walks of life work with a great zeal without any enumeration for long hours which is really commendable. No wonder everyone believes that Holy Mother herself is running the show behind the screen.

Apart from 3 daily routine prayer sessions special events such as Holy Mother's Birthday and death anniversary and Mahashivaratra are celebrated for 7 days with an additional fourth prayer session from 10.30 am to 12.00 noon.

Holy mther appears to be in the tradition of the great Saints of India, who have come from time to time to draw our attention to higher things in life and of the spirit.

Holy mother has written books in Marathi which serve as excellent guidelines to divine truth. A complete biography is written by her close disciple Mrs. M Vishalakshi. The list of publications is given at the back of cover page. Holy Mother has repeatedly emphasised the need to emulate the characters from the storybooks and bring the teachings into practice without which the entire effort is a waste.

[Bhakti](#) was introduced by Holy Mother at 'Shri Hari Mandir has widely spread and has branches in most towns and cities of Maharashtra and Goa state, Belgaum, Hubli, Dharwad, Harihar cities in the state of Karnataka.