

VISHWASTA

The Trustee

The life of industrialist Chandrashekhar Agashe



SHAKUNTALA KARANDIKAR

Translated from Marathi into English by Nandan Phadnis

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*Where it is ordained, there is prosperity;
where there is joy, there is elation, Where there is
sun, there is light,*

*So does the valiant and courageous have Lord
Krishna by his side,*

*Wherever there is Lord Krishna, there is
wealth.*

– Dnyaneshwari



PORTRAIT OF C. G. AGASHE BY RAGHUVeer BHARAM
AT THE BRIHAN MAHARASHTRA COLLEGE OF COMMERCE, PUNE
PAINTED IN 1997 [OIL ON CANVAS]

CHANDRASHEKHAR GOVIND AGASHE

The lead character of this book is my father. It is exactly 36 years today since he left for his heavenly abode.

It is rather late in the day that his life story is being published. This book should have, in reality, been published years ago. Efforts were made to that effect too, but lacked the necessary impetus.

The mother of this boy born in a small village had faith in herself, and came to Pune with her children. Despite lacking support, the miracle that this boy performed on the strength of his own efforts and the values of self-reliance instilled by his mother, is simply incredible!

Intelligent and extremely hard-working as a student, the freedom struggle and love for Swadeshi impacted his education in a big way. Such was the atmosphere in which my father grew up.

Starting out as an ordinary teacher, he went on to become a respected lawyer – purely on the strength of his courage and convictions – and in those times managed to raise one crore rupees from the middle-class, to establish the Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate. He truly is the pioneer of the concept of raising share-capital from the middle-class.

Patriotism, and the love for the Swadeshi movement, played an integral part in the creation of this company. Even after the death of my father, our struggle with circumstances continued, in which the efforts of my late brother, Panditrao, were priceless.

Ensuring the continued survival of the company was the ultimate test. After my father's death, we had to ensure the existence of the company and retain the trust of the middle-class shareholders. In the midst of all this, certain government policies forced us to hand over the sugar business to the cooperative sector. Though this transition was a requirement of the times, I felt the urge to place on record, for the present generation to know, the history my father created, and the world he built out of nothing.

Our maternal uncle, Shri Mukundrao Gokhale, along with Dattaji Kulkarni, made the initial efforts to compile the memories and collate the company's history, on the basis of which Mr. Narubhau Limaye wrote a biography. Though their efforts were fervent and sincere, something was

lacking. Maybe it was the fact that, post my father's death, there was no one around who had witnessed the events of that period. The feelings of intimacy and affection that entail a characterisation were somehow missing.

Finally, as we siblings gathered to discuss the matter, our sister, Shakuntala Bhupendra Karandikar, agreed to do it. As it turned out, her writing was literally the manifestation of our expectations of the portrait and character of my father! Of course, the efforts of all those who had worked on it before her, helped in her writing. After reading the completed version, impatience set in, along with a strong desire to get it published.

The confidence of believing in one's own capabilities, patriotism and a love for Swadeshi, and complete faith in the existence of God; these values manifest in the character of my father.

My father – Mama Saheb – as we called him, was the regal embodiment of bhakti yoga and karma yoga. Lord Vitthal and Rukmini, and Sant Dnyaneshwar were his trustees. I offer this literary creation at the feet of these trustees!

– Dnyaneshwar Agashe

July 10, 1992

*Ashadh Shukrawar, Ekadashi
(11th lunar day of the Hindu month of Ashadh)*

II OM NAMOJI ADHYA II

II SHRI GANESHAY NAMAH II

No auspicious task can commence without the blessings of the Almighty, and writing my father's life story is a monumental task. And so –

A prayer to Lord Ganesh –

Oh! Lord Ganesha. You are the God of knowledge, the inspiration, and thus, I bow to you before commencing this task.

At the outset, let us pray to Lord Ganesha, the ocean of knowledge. Free us of our ignorance and give us intelligence, Oh! Moreshwara [Lord Ganesha's name], the worshipped one, Drive away all our worries, tribulations and sorrows, Oh! Heramb, Gananayaka, Gajamukha [all names of Lord Ganesha], the one who gives happiness to all.

A prayer to goddess Saraswati –

The one wearing the beautiful jasmine garland, the one dressed in spotless white clothes, The one holding the Veena, which she is playing, the one sitting on the lotus throne, The one worshipped by gods such as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, Oh! Goddess Saraswati, the one who eliminates ignorance, please protect me!

Oh! Goddess Saraswati. You are the manifestation of spiritual wisdom; the vibration of musical notes, atoms, and air, is the creation of your power. Your presence can be seen in the knowledge of the learned, the genius of the gifted, the greatness of the mahatmas, and the literature of the scholars. Your exquisite idol, sitting on the lotus throne, adorned in a pure white saree, holding the veena that symbolises the arts, is the source of my inspiration. You, the most auspicious, peaceful and innovative, who looks after the welfare of the cosmos, and facilitates salvation; I am your devotee. I am not a litterateur, but your foot-soldier; and thus, before beginning to write the life story of my respected, God-like father, I bow before thee.

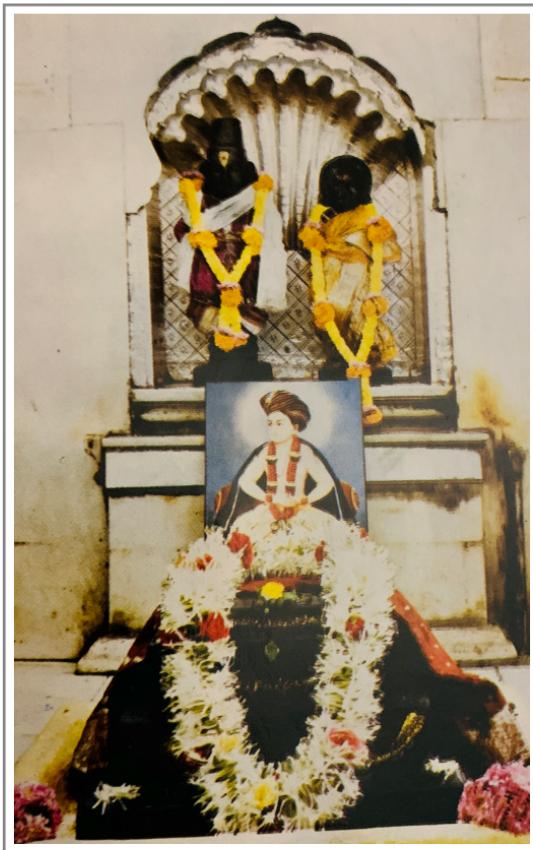
Just as Sant Dnyaneshwar has said to you in deference –

Now, innovative Goddess of eloquence, she who brings astuteness to our speech, She who has enamoured the universe, Oh! Goddess Sharada, I bow to thee!

Oh! Goddess Sharada, I bow before you. Oh! remover of all difficulties, mother of the universe, give me inspiration and success!



MY FATHER'S TRUSTEE DEITY – LORD
PANDURANG



SANT DNYANESHWAR – WHO LIVES IN THE
INNERMOST RECESSES OF MY FATHER'S HEART

IN THE HANDS OF THE MOTHER GODDESS

Pune, my father's place of work, is a historically renowned city. Surrounded by several forts, such as Sinhagad, Raigad and Rajgad, it is a region bearing testimony to the grand exploits of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj; a region of tall mountains and deep valleys, blessed with natural beauty. It is a part of Maharashtra that justifies the tag of being 'the tough, rugged, rocky land'. Close to this city, in Velhe Mahal taluka, lies a village, nestled in the lap of the hills. Gifted by a Marathi king to the 'Mangle' family, it came to be known as 'Mangdari'. Situated in a mountain valley, this village remained secluded from the city of Pune.

It had only about a hundred households, all of them Marathas. The Agashe family, which had come to live with the Mangle family, were the only Brahmin moneylenders. Along with that, they indulged in agriculture too. They lent money, not to become wealthier, but to satisfy the needs of those languishing in poverty since the end of Shivaji's reign. Old folk from that era narrate tales of how there were no instances of harassment, coercive recovery or autocratic behaviour.

The Agashe family built a massive square 'wada' (a traditional Maharashtrian mansion) and a grand and beautiful temple of Lord Ram. Each stone was about an arm span long and wide. One marvels at how it must have been built! The wada and the temple were to the west of the village, on the slope of the hills. As there was no settlement beyond that, Mangdari was like a small fortress of the Agashe family. Unfortunately, since the houses and the Ram temple were destroyed in the aftermath of Mahatma Gandhi's killing, only its ruins are left.

The late Ranganath Agashe I was the original moneylender in the Agashe family.¹ His only son was the late Govind Agashe II, whose wife was the late Radhabai Agashe (née Bapat). These were my wealthy, noble grandparents.

February 14, 1888, was a cold winter's day. Mangdari lay in the warmth of blankets in the early-morning chill. As far as the eye could see, the sky was a beautiful shade of red. As this auspicious day dawned, the

¹ of the Agashe *Gharana* (House) of Mangdari, in the princely state of Bhor; junior branch of the Agashe *Gharana* of Kolambe, Ratnagiri District after c. 1690

Agashe household rejoiced. Radhabai (née Bhimatai) had given birth to a son, who would go on to keep Maharashtra's industrial flame burning bright. Everybody's minds were filled with joy and happiness.

Born into a prosperous family, my father must have been pampered a lot. In an elaborate christening ceremony, Radhabai and Govindrao named their son, Chandrashekhar. His mother though called him Raja. One wonders whether she already sensed his illustrious future! Until the time the factory was established, he was known as Rajabhai.

My father was good-looking and graceful; he had a fair complexion, with a tinge of red; he was tall and well-built, since he exercised regularly; he had a big forehead, a straight nose and comparatively small but discerning eyes, through which his sharp intellect could be clearly seen. Overall, he had a calm and pleasant personality.

He spent his childhood in Mangdari's scenic environment. His daily routine consisted of riding horses, roaming around the village, sitting by the canal, swimming, or going to the fields. He had an elder sister and two younger brothers. Aautai was the eldest, then my father, followed by Pradhan and Narayan. These siblings grew up in the love and care of their parents and my father never experienced sadness until the age of about eight or nine.

His was an affluent childhood. There were many servants in the house, and the cattle sheds were full of cattle. It was a joint family, comprising of his parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts and other relatives, all of whom lived in great harmony. All the rituals and practices were duly observed. Since the atmosphere was a religious one, the right values and culture were being instilled. Life was just about perfect. True to the dictum, 'childhood is bliss', my father's childhood was an extremely happy one, as described by a poet –

*"The earth, prudent and auspicious, in nectar drenched, The lotus-like face of the universe, a shining red Suddenly from the heavens, someone descended,
And was born, Mangdari's beacon of knowledge."*

But...

But! Destiny had something else in mind.

My grandmother sung to her little children –

"As the cradle rocks back and forth,

*Infants frolic in their tiny world,
Nectar, in the hands of the Mother Goddess,
Sprinkled on all corners of the cradle.”*

As she was singing these lines –

*“The Agashe’s Chandrashekhar, like a topaz,
My prince, like gold hidden under my saree-fold,
A new mother’s being is filled with joy,
By the cradle stands the father, Govind.”*

But, as she was immersed in the joys of motherhood, the Gods were mocking her. Destiny dealt a cruel hand. The messenger of death visited this happy household and plunged it into darkness, bringing untold grief on the family. A chain of catastrophic events unfolded. Mangdari was hit by the spread of cholera. Medical facilities, medicines and means of transport were not as developed and easily available as they are today and the village was far from the city of Pune.

My grandfather fell victim to the epidemic, and on the ritualistic thirteenth day after his death, my father’s grandfather, Ranganath Agashe also died. There was mayhem, as more than half the men in the Agashe household succumbed to the epidemic. Who was to reassure whom? Who was to console whom? The only support left was the Almighty!

My grandmother was now the eldest member of the family. Just imagine her situation! Who would pick up the pieces of a life so completely devastated? She didn’t even have the luxury of mourning her dead husband. A lively household had been orphaned. The walls of the house built with such love wept in silence. But she took up the mantle of confronting this crisis. The blow was as sudden as it was devastating, but people with courage and fortitude do not give up in the face of adversity. My grandmother was brave, determined, and resilient.

My paternal aunt was already married then, but the other three kids were still young, and probably oblivious of the magnitude of the tragedy. How could they understand the severity of it all at such a young age? But they would have to face the situation along with their mother, and develop a strong resolve. As of now though, their minds were as innocent and delicate as a flower –

*“Wounds of suffering borne by small, graceful hands,
The new leaves have been burnt by the suffering and pain.”*

The children were young. The support of the house was gone. Once the man of the house had died, relatives began hovering like vultures to usurp the landed property. My widowed, grief-struck grandmother, who had to shave her head and stay in isolation according to the cruel custom of the time, came to a decision. With a resolve to provide her children with an education and a chance to succeed in life, she left Mangdari, with them in tow. She came to Pune, where her father, Mr. Ramchandra Bapat V,¹ lived with his son, and decided to stay there with their support.

Her elder daughter, my paternal aunt, who was married to the late Ramchandra Thatte, also lived in Pune. They owned an Ayurvedic medicine store. But since it only fetched a moderate income, she could not offer monetary help, despite wanting to. She was an extremely kindhearted, magnanimous and earnest woman.

These then were the circumstances in which my father began his schooling at the Nutan Marathi Vidyalay (N. M. V. School). My grandmother was pragmatic, and a strict disciplinarian. She encouraged her children to work in order to support their own education, so they would not become a burden on their benefactors. She paid minute attention to her children's behaviour and studies, and severely punished acts of indiscipline.

My father did several odd jobs to support his education. He and his brother Narayan studied together. The Omkareshwar temple in Pune is a famous shrine, since the time of the Peshwas. There is a temple of Lord Vishnu in its premises, which was owned by a lady, Mrs. Lonkar, who lived by herself. My father would perform pujas in that temple for a fee of two rupees, which took care of his school fees. Impressed with his simplicity, regularity, honesty, orderliness in performing the puja, and respectful behaviour, she gave him ownership of the temple in her will. It remains with the Agashe family to this day and, owing to my father's virtuousness, blessings of Lord Vishnu are upon us.

My father sometimes spoke of his time at the Post Office, where he had the job of stamping. These odd jobs and his education went hand in hand. Around this time, my uncle, Pradhan, fell ill. Due to their poor financial condition, he could not get the requisite treatment, and succumbed to his illness. My father voiced a life-long regret, of my uncle dying due to poverty. The death of his brother was the second major shock he suffered as a child.

Though the setbacks kept coming, my grandmother, father and

¹ of the Bapat Gharana (House) of Naringre, Kalyan, and Junnar; established c. 1570

uncle faced up to them with patience and fortitude. They realised adversities are not overcome by cribbing, but by taking them head on. They understood life was not about harbouring disappointments, but finding the inspiration to achieve something significant, through courage and determination. Showing a rare clarity of thought, they remained stoic through it all.

My father was at an important stage of his student life, his matriculation. He was very good at mathematics and was studying extremely hard. The date for paying the fees approached, but there was no money at hand. His maternal uncle and others could have pitched in, but his mother refused to burden them with it.

At this critical juncture, my paternal aunt came to the rescue. She was very poor, and an ornamental flower of gold, normally worn in the hair, was the only thing of value she possessed. As banks were not yet in existence, she mortgaged her ornament and got the money to pay the fees. It is one thing for an affluent sister to help her brother, but my aunt helping my father, despite her poverty, was a noble act indeed! It is another example of the values our family is steeped in.

People with a big heart never forget the kindness bestowed by others. My father always bore this in mind. He believed that had his sister not paid the fees, he would not even have completed his matriculation, let alone pursuing higher education and becoming an industrialist. And thus, he remained a pillar of strength and support to her till the very end. He helped raise her children, showering them with great love and affection.

Magnanimity, as seen in my father, is rare. People are commonly recognised for their wealth, but those, such as my father, with a mind as spotless and pure as the flow of the Ganges and as majestic as the snow-clad mountains, are singular exceptions.

After passing his matriculation in 1905, my father took up a job teaching mathematics at the N. M. V. School, and enrolled in Fergusson College for his undergraduate studies. Now that he stood on his own feet, he left his maternal uncle's house and set up a new home with his mother and brother. He had taken over the responsibility of the household. Until the Panshet floods, they lived in the wada opposite the Omkareshwar temple (267, Shaniwar Peth), that belonged to the Chitrav family. Like a determined and ambitious person who sets his sights on the path of progress and never looks back, my father left all the bitter memories and experiences behind, and strode on towards a promising future.

He and his brother were like Ram and Lakshman. Pursuing their education with very little money at their disposal, they decided to take turns studying and working, every alternate year. The great love they shared left no room for any disagreements. They went to great lengths to support each other, as they continued their education. As a result of his single-minded dedication, my father completed his B.A. in 1914. Unfortunately, my uncle,

who was studying science, fell ill and could not complete his graduation.

Life was more settled now. Both the brothers were working, my father as a teacher in the N. M. V. School, and my uncle in Military Accounts. As my grandmother also was in a happy place, the question of my father's marriage naturally came up.

My father got married in 1914, the year he graduated. My mother was the eldest daughter of Mr. Narayanrao Gokhale VI,¹ an aristocrat and jeweller from Dharwad. Her maternal uncle, Dr. V. D. Phatak,² with whom she lived as a child, was a famous doctor at the time, and father of Dr. Y. V. Phatak, who himself went on to become a distinguished doctor. The Gokhale family and Dr. Phatak were wealthy people. My father was much poorer in comparison, but Dr. Phatak, impressed with his B.A. degree and gentlemanly behaviour, was convinced of his capabilities and chose him as a nephew-in-law. Thus, Dwarka from the Gokhale household, stepped into the Agashe family as Mrs. Indira Agashe.

My mother had a pointed nose, and was shorter, and darker than my father, who was very fair. She was kind-hearted, hardworking, loving and patient. She showed a willingness to do any kind of work, had the knack of keeping the family together, and instilled the right values in her children. Though she was not a graduate like the modern woman, she took a keen interest in reading, writing, and the arts. If my father's personality was resplendent like a diamond, my mother was the pure gold ornament in which it was set. The beauty of the facets of a diamond is enhanced by the ornament in which it is set, isn't it?

Because she, along with my grandmother, shouldered the responsibility of the entire household, my father could confidently go on to realise his dream of the sugar factory. Success in life can only be achieved if one gets the right life-partner, and my father was very lucky in that respect. From the moment she became a part of his life, fortune smiled on the Agashe family, showering it with success and prosperity.

My mother's importance in his life was such –

*"This blessed woman, your wife, Will make your life heaven,
She the sacred cow incarnate, Is your life partner now."*

¹ of the Gokhale Gharana (House) of Talekhajan-Prindavan; established c.1590

² of the Phatak Gharana (House) of Jambhal; established c. 1730

YOUR MIND IS PURE

Even though there was stability in his life now, my father's ambitious bent of mind would not let him sit quiet. He had a fervent desire to study further. The combination of a sharp intellect and a daring disposition had put him well on the path to success. He quit his job in Pune and took up one in Karachi. In those pre-partition days, many people travelled to places like Karachi and Calcutta in search of work.

Though my father went to Karachi, he didn't stay there long. He quit that job and went to Bombay, where he took up a teaching job in a convent school. He worked here from 1916-1926, during which period he studied Law and got his L.L.B. degree, the examination for which was held in the Government Law College, in 1919. Along with all this, he studiously read books on astrology and philosophy, as also religious texts and several biographies, making a practice of studying every subject in great depth.

People inspired by a mission, a cause, are a different breed altogether. The way they talk, behave and think, is an enigma to others. More often than not, they are early risers. While the masses are fast asleep, they are wide awake. It is an awakening of their minds, their intellect. Then they begin to contemplate. Some think only about themselves, while others think of the society at large, and decide to do something about it. My father would be consumed by the thought of doing something for others, and of uplifting society.

In our house was a huge portrait of the French emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, who had decided to conquer the world, and was a gallant, ambitious and brilliant commander, who aimed for the sky. My father followed his ideal of gallantry and ambition. For people pursuing a dream, such as my father, ambition seems greater than the sky.

After completing his L.L.B. he became a member of the Bar Council, and began practicing as a lawyer. He practiced law in Pune and Bhor, a princely state. He had a fairly successful practice, in which his brilliance and sharp intellect often came to the fore. He perused every single paper related to a case before entering the courtroom. The prosecutor or the defence overlooked some detail at times, but my father didn't miss a single

word. As mentioned earlier, studying every subject thoroughly was in his nature.

Along with his success as a lawyer, he was highly respected in the court of the princely state of Bhor, by virtue of being an elected member of their State Legal Committee. He had been elected specifically to stoutly represent the people at the King's Court. He was the Vice President of the Legislature of the State, where his courteous and temperate behaviour again earned him great respect.

There was a powerful political party in Bhor called Praja Sabha, which belonged to the Deshmukh community. Members of this party went on the rampage during an agitation, leading to riots. Despite being the people's representative, my father protested this act of violence. This shows the conviction he had in his beliefs. The late Tatyasaheb Kelkar also publicly denounced the incident in the Marathi daily, Kesari. My father gave the King of Bhor¹ the authority to personally deal with this hooliganism. He also established a party called Lok Paksh (People's Party), to bring about a peaceful transfer of power, and thus provided guidance to the people of the state.

1920-1930 was a period of apprenticeship for my father in the social, industrial, religious, and other spheres. Though he practiced law, he detested lying. Being an honest person, there were many things in the legal profession he didn't agree with. He would often say, "Why do these people ever fight?" He began feeling suffocated in this atmosphere and decided to give up the profession.

Around this time, the freedom movement came to Maharashtra. Several prominent, patriotic leaders like Lokmanya Tilak, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Veer Savarkar, and Senapati Bapat were spreading awareness among the people. While Veer Savarkar and Senapati Bapat believed in the ideology of 'no freedom without war', Tilak was of the opinion that 'the thirst for Swaraj will not be quenched simply by Suraaj', or good governance (a legacy which Mahatma Gandhi carried forward, after Tilak's death). Gokhale, on the other hand, professed Suraaj through constitutional means.

In his speeches at the time, Tilak would iterate that industry was the only option in front of the country. Gokhale's speeches highlighted the fact that the business of even the most basic items, such as food and clothing, washing and cleaning agents and candles, was carried out with the help of outsiders. He lamented the fact, that along with our political subjugation, we had lost business, industry, and craftsmanship too.

The period of my father's youth was thus, inspirational. People were pledging to use Swadeshi goods. Lokmanya Tilak wanted the youth to

¹ Shri. Shankarrao Chimmajirao Gandekar *Pant Sachiv*, 10th Raja of Bhor (r. 1871 – 1922)

succeed in the field of industry, and uplift society. He realised that Maharashtra lagged in this field and could not progress without it. Thus, in his speeches, he exhorted the youth to work hard, be industrious and facilitate the progress of the state, and thereby, the country. My father was greatly influenced by Tilak's speeches and essays in *Kesari*, and invigorated by his ideology.

It was little wonder then, that my father's mind was restless at this important juncture in the freedom struggle. He was blessed with a sharp intellect and an excellent memory, which enabled him to grasp things instantly. He was convinced that for Maharashtra to progress, he had to enter the field of industry, and took steps in that direction.

He had great respect for all the leaders. He aligned with Veer Savarkar's views, but stayed away from active politics. My uncle, though, was a Gandhian, and actively involved in the freedom struggle. He went to prison too. He had taken a vow of celibacy, which he followed throughout his life. Both the brothers were true patriots in their own right.

By starting the sugar factory, my father facilitated Maharashtra's progress through industry. My uncle too, quit active politics and joined my father in this venture. They were constantly aware of the debt they owed to society, which resulted in the establishment of the Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate, and the successful production of pure, white sugar.

Someone was calling out to his industrious, capable, sensitive mind. Somewhere, the clarion call of inspiration was reverberating thus –

*“That your mind is pure is simply invaluable,
Go on, my friend, never be afraid of, or obliged to, anyone.”*

From an ideological and industrial point of view, the period between 1932-1934 brought about a revolution in my father's life, and altered its course. He had arrived as a lawyer. Knowledge of the law had enabled him to reclaim the landed property usurped by his relatives. He was in his forties now, a time where ordinarily, a person seeks financial security, and to spend the rest of his days in peace and quiet. But my father was no ordinary person!

Because of his amazing intellect and talents, he could dream of starting the sugar factory. He continued to practice law for a little while with the help of my uncle. His office was in the late Vaidya (Ayurvedic doctor) Ganesh Shastri Joshi's wada. My uncle would prep the clients with their testimony, and my father would argue the case in court. This interesting arrangement was possible as they shared a sharp intellect. The legal practice continued in this way, until the sugar factory was up and running.

Since my father was a lawyer in the state of Bhor, and born in Mangdari, he wished to start the sugar factory there, with the twin objectives of providing a livelihood to the people and kickstarting the region's progress. He was convinced that the country's independence would be incomplete without economic growth, and the financial situation of the farmers would not change merely by producing sugarcane as a cash crop, but by producing sugar from it, and selling it on the market. Around the same time, an astrologer predicted that the colour white would give his life a new direction. Being a strong believer, he decided on starting the sugar factory.

Whenever he travelled to Bhor for his law-related work, he would stay with his friend, the late Annasaheb Kale. They would discuss my father's plans, along with politics and religion, under the thick green canopy of the mango groves. These discussions would often end with the topic of improving the lives of the poor farmers.

The Bhatghar Dam, near Bhor, was completed on October 27, 1928. Leslie Wilson, the Governor of Bombay at the time of the dam's construction,¹ claimed it to be the world's longest dam providing water to the fields. To ensure optimum use of this water supply, the land was demarcated into 2-acre blocks, which the government put up for sale.

My father was bent on starting the sugar factory in Shirval, a village in the Bhor State. The government had decided to allow machinery with a capacity of producing up to 250 tons of sugar. The King of Bhor and others owned about 2000 acres of land, suitable for growing sugarcane. But either because the King, or the people's representative, did not agree with my father's plans, the sugar factory could not come up in this princely state. Though this was an inauspicious start, my father was committed to realising his dream.

The discussions at his friend's house continued, until one day a decision was made to start a sugar factory by the name, Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate. The registration was completed on September 21, 1934. The idea behind naming the factory Brihan Maharashtra was to send a message to the Marathi brethren, from Delhi to Madras, that this factory was for them and belonged to them, something that soon became a reality.² This all-encompassing outlook, right from its name, ensured the factory's success.

Although the factory had officially come into existence, the road ahead was anything but easy. My father was prepared for the tough grind though. He was well aware, that for the good of society, one needs to remain committed, and be willing to make sacrifices; for the talents and

¹ Sir Leslie Wilson, the 20th Governor of the Bombay Presidency (in office 1923 – 1926)

² *Brihan*, in Sanskrit and Marathi, meaning 'large in sense of greatness'

personalities of others to blossom, one needs to walk in the dark and provide light; for the country to make a mark in the world, one has to be driven and work relentlessly. He was prepared to do all this.

Once a marriage is finalised, the man of the house doesn't even have time to breathe. From the ritual of applying turmeric paste, to selecting the ceremonial sarees, there are a hundred things to attend to. It is easy when there is enough money at hand, but when money is at a premium, myriad problems surface.

My father's situation was exactly the same as he set about building his factory. The only capital at his disposal was an irrepressible ambition, supreme self-confidence, a sharp intelligence and a willingness for relentless effort. To convert this into a factory was a difficult and improbable task. Some even thought it was impossible to achieve. But my father was determined, and had great faith in his values and beliefs.

When a person is committed to a cause, his mentality changes accordingly, and he becomes an astute judge of desirable and undesirable qualities. My father's commitment to the cause was not dependent on external factors, but on the inspiration that came from within.

He had to battle on several fronts, all at once. He started with whatever little money he had at his disposal. The scope of the factory was vast. Lakhs of rupees were required. Work began on scouting for a place, procuring machinery, recruitment, and appointing a board of directors that would inspire confidence. He envisaged using the water from the Bhatghar Dam, acquiring a 2,000-acre block in the place of his birth, and setting up the factory as a gold mine for the state of Bhor in the future.

He expected the King's¹ partnership, and the people's participation in this enterprise, which he believed would be a template for other industries to follow. But the King's refusal put a spanner in the works. The King, and other narrow-minded people, did not comprehend the magnitude of my father's aspirations.

But he did not lose hope, as he had great faith in his cause, and a strong resolve. He had put up a placard at the entrance to our house which read, 'God gives the resolve to speak the truth'. Drawing strength from the spiritual teachings of the Dnyaneshwari, the blessings of his mother, and an indomitable faith in Lord Pandurang, he continued to toil relentlessly in pursuit of his dream. He realised spirituality was nothing but making peace with one's present circumstances.

His deep devotion to Lord Pandurang, who for him was the supreme consciousness, gave him increasing confidence. Every time he visited the Pandurang temple, his mind would become calm, solutions to his

¹ Sir Raghunathrao Shankarrao Gandekar *Pant Sachiv*, 11th Raja of Bhor (r. 1922 – 1948)

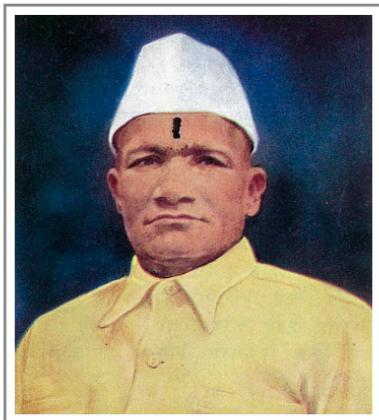
problems would come to him, and he would be inspired to take on the next challenge.

The company had started work in Pune, but to set up the factory, my father had to travel 110 miles from Pune, to the wilderness of Bhorgaon, in the Pandharpur region. This was the only option, since he had been allotted a block at intersection number 21 of the Nira right bank canal. People mired in poverty would soon be uplifted; a region, with no drinking water, would be rejuvenated. It was a blessing in disguise for my father, but only he knew the ordeal by fire he would have to go through. I think he must have addressed the Lord thus –

*“Oh Lord! Oh Almighty!
Give us the wings to fly, O Lord of the Universe!
Give us the wealth of success,
A mission, a purpose,
Take our ship to shore, O compassionate Lord! May our
reputation reach the sky!”*



MY FATHER'S MOTHER, THE LATE
RADHABAI AGASHE (NÉE BAPAT)
(D. 1951)



MY FATHER'S SUPPORT, HIS
YOUNGER BROTHER, THE LATE
NARAYAN AGASHE III
(D. 1952)



THE LATE MRS. JANAKIBAI
THATTE, MY FATHER'S SISTER,
AND OUR PATERNAL AUNT

THE VOW HAS NOT BEEN BLINDLY TAKEN

My father's dream of setting up the sugar factory got a shot in the arm after the government introduced an act in 1932, imposing a protective duty on imported sugar in order to safeguard indigenous factories.¹ This act, which also empowered the Governor General² to carry out periodic inspections and hike the duty if the indigenous factories were being adversely affected, proved to be a godsend for the sugar industry, and made a big impression on my father.

The fervent desire of starting an indigenous factory would not let him sit still. When you think of it, he was a lawyer by profession, and had neither the knowhow, nor an understanding, of the working of the sugar industry. He had no experience as a farmer either. But once he set his mind on something, he was consumed by it. Thus, he began studying books on agriculture and engineering, and reading scientific literature to learn about the machinery. The sugar industry was still in its nascent stages in Maharashtra, but his inquisitive mind and studious vision recognised the great future that lay ahead.

The sugar industry created many sugar barons in the rural parts of Maharashtra. My father never became one, nor did he crave for it. His ambition, instead, was to build this industry for and through people belonging to the middle-class. His desire, and endeavour, was to create a factory which would be inherently different from that set up by capitalists for the sole purpose of making money.

My father liked doing social work, and was proud of Marathi society, and of Maharashtra. He wished to set up his business with the help of the common man, along with the middle-class, and wanted its design to be far-sighted and sustainable.

He realised the farmers were not yet used to sugarcane being the main crop. Thus, he decided to install sugar manufacturing machinery to supplement the sugarcane cultivation.

The land allotted for the factory was barren, and prone to famine.

¹ enacted by Sir Frederick Sykes, 22nd Governor of the Bombay Presidency (in office 1928 –1933)

² undertaken by The Lord Brabourne, 24th Governor of the Bombay Presidency (in office 1933 – 1937)

The owners had more than 50-60 acres of land, but the produce per acre ranged between 5-50 quintals. Most of the farmers were either in debt, or barely grew enough to subsist on. They were thus delighted that someone was willing to pay rent for their land, or buy it at a reasonable price.

The land was going to be rejuvenated, once the water from intersection number 21 started flowing. People who knew about development in this field were well aware of the time, effort and money required to make arable land fit for sugarcane farming. In 1935, the process of sugarcane production was a tedious one, involving cultivation, irrigation and finally, conversion to sugar. But my father was determined to set up the factory, come what may. He was prepared to face every ordeal.

Experts opined that the land on which the factory stood at present was conducive for the production of sugarcane. My father benefitted a great deal from the guidance of the late Vishnu Vinayak Vartak, the first Indian engineer to be appointed in the Engineering Department of the Government of Bombay. He was a highly experienced engineer, and had worked on the Sukkur Barrage scheme in Sindh. His word carried a lot of weight in the Irrigation Department. Another engineer, Mr. Paranjape, who was a friend of Mr. Vartak, also joined Brihan Maharashtra. One brilliant mind attracted another, and thus, a succession of brilliant and capable people came to be a part of the organisation.

My father needed a man as committed as himself to look after the land deals, structure, management and setting up of the factory. He didn't have to look far, because such a man was in Bhorgaon itself – my uncle, the late Narayan Kaka – who took over these responsibilities. He had been released from prison recently. For him, his brother's family, and the sugar factory, were like his own. He was as intelligent, brilliant, resolute, hard-working, brave, and capable as my father. More importantly, the brothers were on the same wavelength. For my father, Narayan Kaka, who stood shoulder to shoulder with him in good and bad times, and thought of my father's happiness and grief as his own, was a source of great strength.

It requires a big heart, to take a backseat, and allow someone else to progress and prosper. But dedicated people like my uncle do it effortlessly. The brothers could manage the gargantuan task of setting up the factory because of their willingness to make sacrifices for each other.

The factory needed sugarcane, for which land was required. The moment my father and uncle put their hand up to rent or buy the land, the farmers were ecstatic. The land was anyway yielding nothing. People from the Mali community, smart enough to see the changing future, snidely commented that agriculture, horticulture, and setting up factories were not a Brahmin's cup of tea!

On the political front, my father had the backing of his friend from Bhor, the late Anna Pandurang Konde-Deshmukh, who later served on the

board of directors too. My father benefitted from the fact that Mr. Konde-Deshmukh had many relatives, friends and associates in the region.

My uncle was an extremely affable person, and always had the interests of the people at heart. He could be stern if the situation warranted, but otherwise, had a loving nature. As he sought to protect the interests of these illiterate people, and ensure they were not cheated, he came to be fondly called ‘Narayan Kaka’ by the people of the region.¹ The poor and downtrodden worshipped him like a God.

People such as Narayanrao Kulkarni, Yenba Kadam and Bhimrao Landge, met the local farmers, explained the concept of the factory, and set up meetings with Narayan Kaka. Once the farmers met Narayan Kaka, they were won over. If he thought the rent demanded by them was on the lower side, he would raise it of his own accord. Such foresight helped the factory in a big way. My father’s and uncle’s whole outlook towards life was that of a trustee.

In later years, many prominent industrialists in the region had to face farmer agitations, demonstrations and strikes, but not Brihan Maharashtra. It is testimony to the trust the people had in them, which endures to this day.

My father got a lot of support from the Bhaichand Nemichand Vora financial services company of Akluj, which had interests tied up with the people from whom the Agashe brothers had bought the land at the current rate. The Vora brothers thus, automatically got an opportunity to recover their pending dues.

The factory, set up in a backward region where there was no work, and where the farmers went to bed on an empty stomach, or a pitcher-full of water if they were lucky, generated employment for the people. As it produced only 250 tons of sugar, and was small compared to today’s standards, bullock carts were the preferred mode of transport. These belonged to the farmers who had provided the land for the factory, and thus, people of the region now got employment round the year. Also, at least one member of each family was employed at the factory.

In a nutshell, my father and uncle gave these people a new lease of life! Their vision was similar to that of the saints, and proof of their social commitment.

Before the factory came up, there was no water within a 7-8-mile radius in the wilderness. But intersection number 21 of the Nira right bank canal, which was allotted to the factory through the monumental efforts of my father and uncle, took care of the water scarcity.

The brothers, though, had to face stiff opposition from people with

¹ *Kaka*, being the term for one’s paternal uncle, in Marathi

vested interests, who began a reverse propaganda, saying, “What do these Brahmins from Pune know about setting up a factory? They will lose their land. Then there will neither be rent, nor ownership”!¹

But my uncle was smart. He decided that since they had come a long way, and the factory had to be set up, they would adjust with all types of people and situations. They accommodated every reasonable request, and carried out transactions with minimum fuss. But if someone resorted to unreasonable demands and arm twisting, they were capable of putting him in his place. They were fearless!

For many years, they lived in a tin shed built on one side of the moorland, with only the most basic amenities. They had a servant called Amruta, and a cook called Bhagwat. God alone knows how these two lived there by themselves!

My father would come back to the factory, whenever he could, after completing his work in Pune. During his days as a lawyer, he had bought a car. But the roads were not paved, and even a glass of water would not be available on the way. The journey would take about 8-10 hours, and the tires would get punctured frequently. But it didn’t matter, as his only goal until the factory was set up, and even after, was to toil day and night. The amount of hard work they put in numbs the mind even today.

Through his firm policies, my uncle acquired 12,000 acres of land from the farmers, with the aim of cultivating 2,000 acres of sugarcane. Some of it was leased, the rest was bought. Over time, the quality of the land improved, and began yielding around 50-60 tons of sugarcane per acre.

Though on the one hand, my uncle was facilitating the agricultural land required for the factory, the bigger challenge of raising capital still remained. Selling the company’s share capital was a major task, because of my father’s fervent desire for the company to belong to the middle-class, and remain so.

There were many ingenious Marathi people in those days, who designed innovative projects, but had to sell them to capitalists due to lack of finances. In the two decades between 1935-55, none of these businesses survived, despite the best efforts of several people. Against this backdrop, my father insisted the factory should belong to the middle-class, and thereby made them the shareholders. In the initial period, Mukundrao Paranjape joined him.

The work of selling the share capital had begun. With the objective of getting the share capital from a particular class, my father travelled to places where Marathi people lived, both within and outside Maharashtra.

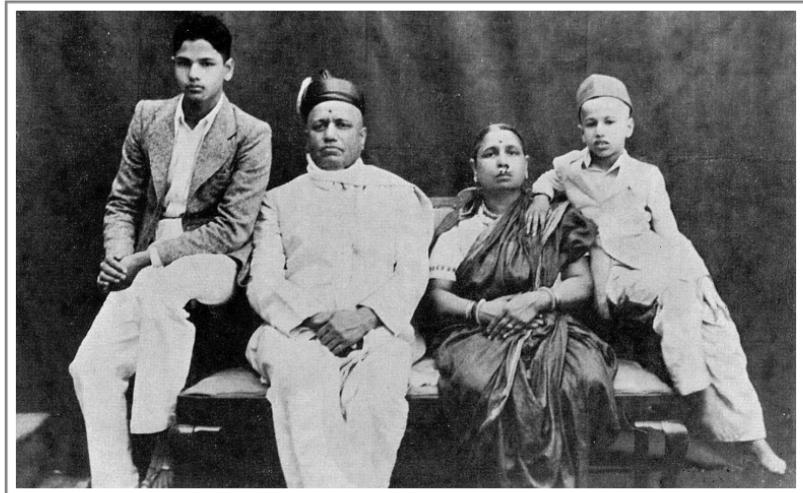
¹ Brahmins, being the upper-most varna (caste), were traditionally intellectuals, scholars, monarchs, priests, physicians, educators and protectors of sacred learning; thus, agriculture, warfare, and trade were not seen as Brahmanical occupations

He carried a couple of stalks of sugarcane in his bags, and would tell the Marathi man, “I am going to produce sugar from this sugarcane. The Vartak factory in Maharashtra has shut down, and to stop the import of sugar from Mauritius, I am going to start a sugar factory”. In this way, he would kindle love for the country, and Marathi pride, in that person, who would be so impressed by my father’s personality and demeanour, that he would agree to buy shares of the company, despite being short of funds.

Patriotism, and pride in one’s country, were the inspiration behind starting the factory. My father was not motivated by money. He was earning well as a lawyer, had built an excellent reputation as a people’s representative in the princely state of Bhor, and had a share in the ancestral property too. Like most affluent people, he could have lived a life of leisure, but the desire of doing something for the nation, and for Maharashtra, rather than personal gain, drew him towards industry.



THE LATE
JAGDISH "PANDITRAO" AGASHE
MY BROTHER, A DYNAMIC
PERSONALITY TAKEN TOO SOON



MY BROTHERS WITH OUR PARENTS, A RARE PHOTOGRAPH
CIRCA 1950S

THE SYNDICATE AND AGASHE SAHEB: TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

My father began preparations for setting up the factory in right earnest. Around 1934, a number of thinkers were striving to industrialise both Maharashtra and India as a whole. My father was soon to become an industrialist himself.

But for industry to thrive, the society's psyche needs to be primed. For generations, the Marathi man has been involved in agriculture, education, and the medical and legal professions. The thinkers felt the need for an organisation that would perform the revolutionary task of attracting the youth to the wealth-creating and augmenting field of industry, as also encouraging and guiding them. This led to the formation of the Mahratta Chamber of Commerce and Industries, on March 16, 1934.¹

In February 1935, the Chamber organised a conference of businessmen and industrialists, in which my father proposed that it was the duty of the Government of Bombay to offer every concession possible to the sugar factories in Maharashtra, in a bid to help them succeed. This was seconded by Mr. Damuanna Potdar, an active member of the Chamber, and my father's friend and associate. The proposal went on to list steps the government should take, namely –

1. Dig an irrigation trench for the water from the canal.
2. Make suitable arrangements for trains and other means of transport, for the benefit of the sugar industry in Maharashtra.
3. Give concessions to use the molasses from the sugar business for beneficial purposes.

My father strove to get his plans for the factory approved by the Representative Committee of the Chamber. In response, a sub-committee was appointed, consisting of Dhondumama Sathe, G. D. Apte, D. G. Bapat, R. N. Abhyankar (son-in-law of my father's sister) and S. R. Rajguru. The

¹ founded by Atmaram Raoji Bhat, Marathi social worker (b. 1905 – d. 1983)

committee physically audited the plans for the cultivation, the land and production of sugarcane. On the basis of its report, which certified the Syndicate's plans as commercially viable, the Chamber appealed to the Maharashtrian people to buy the remaining 3 lakh¹ shares of the Syndicate.

Despite a certification by the Chamber, it wasn't easy for the Syndicate to raise the share capital. The decade between 1930-40 witnessed an economic slowdown. 87 banks in the country had failed, including the Pune and Shilotri Banks.

This downturn notwithstanding, industrialisation was seeing a new dawn. Exhibitions of Swadeshi goods were being held, in which Marathi names such as Kirloskar, Ogale, Tarkar (who manufactured utensils), Kaka Ganpule from Morvi (who was in the ceramic business), Dandekar from Bhiwandi (who manufactured rice-making machines), Dhani Velankar from Sangli, Nana Saheb Puranik from Dhootpapeshwar, the Sandu Brothers, and the Dongres (who made Bal Amrut) featured prominently.

Barring Kirloskar and Ogale, the rest were small-scale industrialists. Most of these industries were established thanks to the foresight of the southern princely states of Aundh, Sangli and Ichalkaranji, among others, and the encouragement, support and concessions they offered.

Despite all this, the shareholders were wary due to the failure of the banks. That my father set out to start a sugar factory on the strength of share capital raised through the middle-class, was adventurous and, from the people's point of view, a wonder.

The Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate was finally established on September 21, 1934, with an official capital of ₹20 lakh. The distribution for the sale of shares was as follows: 40,000-45,000 shares worth ₹25 each, 50,000 shares worth ₹10 each, and 5% preferred stock. Also, the money for these shares was not to be paid at one go; ₹5 had to be paid along with the application, and the rest, in four instalments. Soon, the board of directors was instituted, which comprised –

1. Mr. Narasimha Chintaman Kelkar – B.A. L.L.B., Trustee, Kesari and Maratha, Pune²
2. Mr. Vishnu Narayan Vartak – M.A. L.C.E., Retired Chief Engineer, P. W. D., Pune
3. Prof. Vamanrao Kale – M.A., Ex-Member of the Indian Traffic Board
4. Hon. Mr. Jagannath Maharaj Pandit – 1st Class Sardar and

¹ *Lakh*, a unit in the Indian numbering system equal to one hundred thousand (100,000)

² Narasimha Chintaman Kelkar, Marathi writer, poet, and philosopher (b. 1872 – d. 1947)

- Inamdar, Council of State Member, Bhau Maharaj House
5. Sir Govind Balwant Pradhan – Advocate, O. I. S., Mumbai
 6. Dr. V. D. Phatak – L.R.C.P., M.R.C.S., L.M., Pune
 7. Dr. Raghunath Ganesh Thakur – L.M.S., State Surgeon, Sangli
 8. Mr. Annaji Pandurang Konde-Deshmukh – Landowner and Businessman, President of the Deshmukh Community, Bhor

To start with, the company's office was situated in Ayurvedacharya Ganesh Shastri Joshi's wada. It later shifted to Bhide's wada, opposite Belbaug, and then to the Commonwealth Insurance Company building, on Lakshmi Road, where it exists to date. Chandrashekhar Govind Agashe – my father – and Mr. Paranjape, were appointed as the company's managing agents.

It is specifically mentioned in the company's brochure, that the sugarcane from which sugar would be produced would be cultivated on the company's own land. The following was also decided – machinery capable of producing 250 tons of sugar per day would be installed initially, and then increased to 600 tons; the land for cultivation of sugarcane would either be bought or rented, through a contract with the original owner; and the portion of land allotted by the government for water would be around 13,000 acres, and suitable for cultivation. Though the future was certainly bright, it was bound to be a long and arduous journey.

Among the first 20 shareholders of the company were such prominent people as N. C. 'Tatyasaheb' Kelkar, Sir Govindrao Pradhan, Wamanrao Kale, Sardar Jagannath Maharaj Pandit, and Balasaheb Kher, who went on to become the Chief Minister of Maharashtra. These people, though not hugely affluent, were idealists, which helped my father convince them to join him in his mission. It was a matter of great honour for him that the Mahratta Chamber, having audited the Syndicate in detail, commended the plan, and appealed to the Marathi people to buy its shares.

In those times, many retired engineers from other companies, and gazetted I. A. S. officers, were willing to join the board of directors. But they demanded, besides other perks, that the managing agents buy their shares for them, as they felt they were doing the company a favour by being on its board. Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate did not need to pander to the greed of such people, as it had a host of idealists on its board, and also because the idea of the factory was inspired by the love for, and pride in, one's country.

Brihan Maharashtra could be said to be the only company with the clause '*in the service of all the charitable institutions in and outside Maharashtra*' incorporated in its mission statement. Vested with this authority, my father made several small and large donations. It is incredible that such donations were made even when he, personally, and the Brihan

Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate, were facing financial difficulties. This underlines his love and affection for Maharashtra.

My father, and the Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate, had become synonymous with each other. He moved heaven and earth for the company, and for its shares to be sold. He began touring the country to reach out to the people. The real test though was yet to come.

He believed raising the share capital would be rather straightforward, since he had a sound plan peppered with the sentiment of patriotism, and many relatives, friends and acquaintances.

The Marathi man, though, was known to have a discerning nature; extra-cautious when it came to investing money, and more concerned with its security, than the rate of interest it would fetch. My father was well aware of this, and had an acute estimation of the prospective shareholders of his company. He had already decided to raise the capital through the middle-class. It was hard enough asking people for something trivial, but to ask for money, and that too for a factory that was to come up in the future, was an incredibly difficult task.

But my father was a keen student of human behaviour and had the ability to convince people. Also, his superb physique, serene expression and sense of dressing, earned him a lot of respect and prestige. He wore a pure white dhoti (a wrap-around worn by men in India) and shirt, a long coat over it, a pagdi (a traditional headgear of Marathi men), a scarf, and shoes or chappals; his charismatic personality was instantly reassuring. His walk was majestic, like that of the king of the jungle, every step oozing confidence.

Almost always, the other person would be overwhelmed, and instead of bothering about the company's plans and the interest he would get, he would think of my father as a friend asking money for a noble cause. He believed his money was not being entrusted to the company, but to my father himself, and would give as much as he could.

The Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate was in Pune, the factory was about 125 miles away in Bhorgaon, in Solapur district, and its first ever shareholder was from Devrukh, a small town in Ratnagiri. His name was Jayram Shivram Desai, and the date of his application was January 6, 1935. This gives us an idea of the scale of my father's travels in pursuit of selling the company's shares. His efforts, to get the sale of shares underway, and his desire of starting the production of sugar as soon as water became available to the 2,000 acres of sugarcane fields, underlines his grand vision and aspirations.

The sale of shares was not yet picking up. My father's travels continued, from Dharwad and Hubli, to Indore and Gwalior. His focus was the middle-class Marathi man from distant regions. Not only did he grasp the undercurrent of Marathi pride, he himself was very much a part of it.

His efforts continued unabated.

Several doctors, lawyers, engineers, and other retired officers supported Brihan Maharashtra, but it was not enough. The share-price was only ₹25. The sale was to be completed within a period of one year. The dividend on share-profit would only be given once the factory had operated for a couple of years and the costs recovered. The middle-class though, was more inclined towards keeping its money in a fixed deposit. At such a time, the board of directors would meet, but only to approve the sale of shares and that too, not in person, but by issuing a circular to that effect, which would later be ratified in everyone's presence. 60 circulars were issued in this way for the sale of shares.

The expenditure exceeded the income. In an attempt to make up for this shortfall, my father implemented the idea of taking deposits. In November 1937, the board of directors passed a resolution that deposits should be taken to pay for the machinery ordered, and the managing agents who brought these deposits should get a commission of 1%. Later, it was decided to give a commission of 5%, plus a 2% traveling allowance, to managing agents who sold shares worth ₹50,000.

The cost of the Škoda machinery was 7,218 pound sterling. It was decided to raise the equivalent amount in Indian rupees through deposits. Though water was now available, the land was not yet suitable for the sugarcane crop. Cultivation of this land was another expense, and money continued to remain an issue.

My father did not seek government funds for the establishment of the Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate. The Bank of Maharashtra, a bank close to the hearts of the Marathi people, and which proved to be a huge support for the company in later years, was not yet big enough. In his mind, my father was convinced that the affluent Marathi man would be his patron.

He used the *Kesari*, started by Lokmanya Tilak, to reach out to this class.

The peculiar thing about this newspaper was that it would first be published weekly and then, bi-weekly. It was a staple in every Marathi household, from Ratnagiri to Calcutta. Often the words, 'What does the *Kesari* say today?', or 'Such and such article has been published in the *Kesari*', could be heard in erudite Marathi households.

My father used both, the medium and the sentiment, of the *Kesari*, for the purpose of the company, to good effect. The company's advertisements would be prominently, and attractively displayed in it. Taking deposits was not the accepted norm in society at the time, but my father employed it with great success. This came to be known as the '*Agashe Pattern*'.

The company placed an order for the machinery at the beginning

of 1937. Around this time, an atmosphere of uncertainty was spreading across Europe. Hitler had risen to prominence in Germany. In 1937-38, all the German factories were involved in manufacturing war-related goods. Brihan Maharashtra was initially toying with the idea of placing the order with a German company, but Hitler declared war on September 1, 1937, so the order was placed instead with the Škoda company,¹ and the machinery reached India on time.

The advertisements continued to be featured in the *Kesari*. The ones for the shares had Mr. Vartak's signature on them, while the ones for the deposits had my father's. As far as the depositors were concerned, my father's word, his personal life and income, rather than the company's income, was the surety. His role itself was that of a trustee. My father viewed money not as an end in itself, but as a means of bringing about development in society.

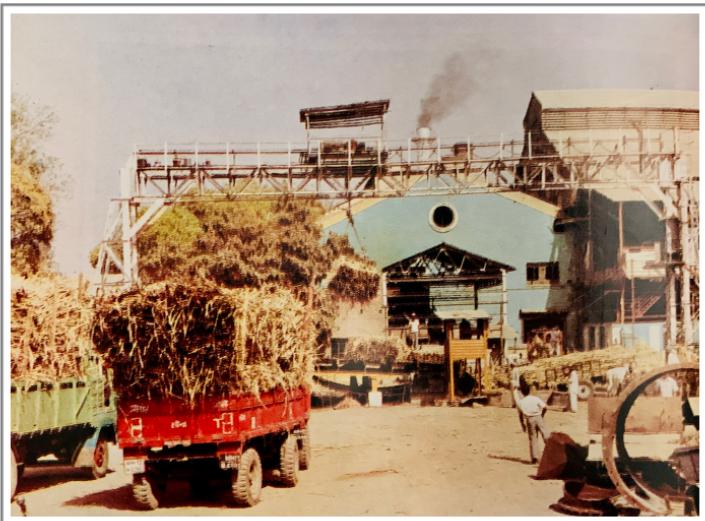
Recounting a memory about my father, Shankarrao Limaye, his associate from his days in Bhor, and former Chairman of the company says, "For a person dealing in crores of rupees,² he (my father) never built a bungalow, and lived in a rented house till the very end."

There is a provision in the company's constitution (clause 121-16, 16 A) for providing medical, educational and other facilities to current and former employees. The same clause also extends help and support to charitable, educational, and scientific institutions dedicated to the national cause, and in the service of the common man. There are no linguistic, religious, regional or zonal limitations. Furthermore, a sum of up to ₹25,000 is set aside for political parties, or for any work in the nation's interest.

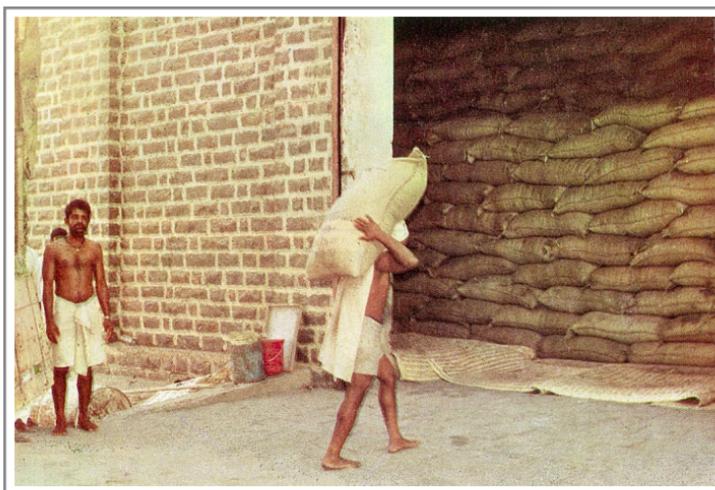
Come to think of it, all of my father's plans have been self-sufficient, flawless, and visionary. He considered the factory as his own large family. He was devout, and a man of his word. He believed that the factory did not belong to him, rather he belonged to the factory, and whatever he was doing was because of destiny.

¹ at the time, known as Škoda Works, based in Czechoslovakia

² Crore, a unit in the Indian numbering system equal to ten million (10,000,000)



THE SUGAR FACTORY IN SHREEPUR, CIRCA 1992



AS THE JASMINE BLOSSOMS

My father toured the length and breadth of the country until the end of 1937, battling on the financial front by selling shares in every way possible and securing deposits on the strength of meticulous planning, in-depth knowledge, a bright future for the business, and trust. In a very short span of time, deposits worth ₹10 lakh accrued.

My father successfully pioneered the concept of utilising shares and deposits, along with the share capital, towards setting up a factory. By the beginning of 1938, this plan seemed somewhat unpopular, but as the payment of the machinery had to be settled, the board of directors, despite some differences of opinion, gave their nod, and the financial situation of the company improved. My father's efforts got a strong moral backing in the form of Kesari, a newspaper that sought to create a social awakening, and was largely trusted to print only the truth.

Around this time, the president of the company, N. C. 'Tatyasaheb' Kelkar, resigned. Though he had simultaneously resigned from other companies too, it nevertheless provided an opportunity for the detractors to spread rumours.

Soon after, my brother, Ranganath, died of typhoid.¹ The renowned Dr. Phatak tried every treatment possible and no expense was spared, but it was all to no avail. The hopes and aspirations my father had for his son were extinguished along with the flame of his life. Our souls were singed with grief! A pall of gloom descended over my father and the rest of the family. Even as he mourned the loss of his beloved son, my father had to get back to the task of running the business.

Amidst all this, my father was able to convince those who mattered, of this new concept that limited companies should seek deposits. The following provides an example (occurring at a later date, in the 1950s): a matter related to the Lakshmi Narayan Shetkari Sangh, had to be referred to the then Finance Minister of India, Sir Chintamanrao Deshmukh, where it was admitted that the law had been bypassed at times. Seeing my father's

¹ Ranganath Agashe II (1928 – 1940)

pure intentions, honesty, and selfless devotion towards the factory, Sir Chintamanrao not only asked for the matter to be registered officially, but also expressed a desire “to meet this Agashe, who has managed to secure deposits worth ₹1.10 crore in Maharashtra”. These words of Sir Chintamanrao were nothing but an endorsement of my father’s policies.

The two years, between 1937-39, proved to be a real test. My father was almost single handedly fighting on all fronts, be it raising finances, placing orders for, and setting up, the machinery, or ensuring the production of 250 tons of sugar. To be fair, he had my uncle to assist him in the agricultural department, and specially selected technicians in setting up the factory. Diwan Bahadur Limaye had replaced Tatyasaheb Kelkar as the President of the company, and it was generally felt that the company and the factory would now be established.

My father would issue clarifications and reassuring replies through advertisements in the *Kesari*. One such advertisement read, ‘*The machinery ordered will be delivered in the month of June*’. It was March 1938, the time of the inception of the factory. With near-empty pockets, my father and his associates were talking in terms of lakhs of rupees. Advertisements such as ‘*We accept deposits*’; ‘*The machinery has been ordered and is on its way*’; ‘*It has arrived*’; ‘*The sugarcane is ready*’, were an appeal to the people for raising money in Pune, and delivering it to Bhorgaon, to expedite the setting up of the factory.

This was my father’s unique way of winning the depositors’ trust. He had an innate talent for advertising and an uncanny ability to both silence the detractors and satisfy the inquisitive in just a few eye-catching lines. Purely on the strength of these advertisements, he managed to secure deposits of ₹1,000-50,000 every day, and the launch of the factory gained momentum.

The machinery began arriving. It would be delivered up to Bhigvan by train, and from there to the factory in specially chartered vehicles. Vinayakrao Patwardhan was in charge of the logistics there. The responsibility of taking delivery of the machinery at the Mumbai Port and completing the Customs formalities was given to Messrs. Pusalkar. If ever there was a shortage of funds, not only did these people never approach my father for the money, but, in fact, paid out of their own pockets. They treated it as their own work, and knew my father would pay them later.

The foundation stone for the factory was laid in 1938, on the auspicious occasion of Gudi Padwa (a Maharashtrian festival), at the hands of the incumbent Chairman, Mr. Vartak. Since photography, or large-scale publicity was not in vogue at the time, photographs of the ceremony aren’t available.

Now, my father’s focus of work had totally shifted to Bhorgaon. The plans that had convinced the people were still on paper, and had to be

turned into reality. It was one thing to tell the people that water was available, suitable land had been acquired for the production of sugarcane, and the markets were open for sugar – a daily commodity – but something else to actually get a sackful of sugar.

My father started travelling to Bhorgaon almost every day. He would finish work at the Pune office, arrange for the money, and then drive 110 miles to Bhorgaon, often late at night, on very poor roads, with no en route facilities. But since all he thought of was setting up the factory, these inconveniences seemed trivial to him. He would stand on the moorland, like a commander surveying his army, plan out the work, and instruct his technicians accordingly. He worked tirelessly until the machinery was installed, the sugarcane crop was ready and converted to sugar.

The same could be said about my uncle too, who stood firmly alongside his brother, looking after the management of the farming business, supervising the setting up of the factory, settling workers' issues, and generally ensuring there was no break in the work.

The brothers would be on their feet for 6-7 hours at a stretch. The fruit of their labor was that Brihan Maharashtra's first sugar season began in March 1939. Pure white granular sugar was produced in this Swadeshi factory, started by a Marathi man, on the back of capital raised by the middle-class. It was decided to name this brand of sugar 'Shree' [श्री]. Bhorgaon's gram panchayat (village council) thus renamed the village Shreepur!

My father showed great wisdom in choosing this name, because Shree is not merely a letter or a word, but an idea that constantly inspires a cultured society. It has a certain sanctity and purity to it, as also a sense of grandeur and prosperity. But more than anything, it has the enormous capacity of rejuvenating every individual, and the society at large. It brings prestige, and denotes wealth and abundance, is a proclamation of auspiciousness and awakening, drives away despondency and all that is inauspicious and ominous, and makes the mind pleasant. It is the soft, gentle music of the anklets of Goddess Lakshmi, and the veena of Goddess Saraswati. It is all that is beautiful, noble, fervent, radiant and moving.

That my father thought of this as the brand name is another example of his sharp intellect. He wanted to offer a sackful of this beautiful sugar to Lord Pandurang. I can vividly imagine the pure joy on the faces of my father, uncle, and their colleagues while making this offering. They must have shed tears of joy as they bowed before the regal, tender, handsome Lord. The scene cannot be described in words! True to his humble nature, he must have said to Lord Pandurang –

"A small sapling that was planted,

Has grown into a vine, that touches the sky.”

THE DIFFICULT PATH OF CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES

1938-40 was a successful period for Brihan Maharashtra. The season was a good one, and the machinery worked exceedingly well. The company put out an advertisement in 1939 with the headline, '*Proud Maharashtra*'. A guarantee of producing sugar worth ₹12 lakh was given for the 1940 season. My father's endeavour was winning accolades. Against the backdrop of this success, the Annual Meeting of the company was held on January 23, 1940. Prior to that, true to the nature of the Marathi man, a few doubts and misgivings were beginning to surface, but my father's idea of securing deposits was a successful one.

The account of the meeting, held in January, was reported thus in the *Kesari* –

"The meeting, adjourned in December, was reconvened in January, to apprise the shareholders of the company's business. They would be happy to learn that the company's balance sheet, a report of the working of the board of directors, and the profit and loss account has been unanimously passed. On behalf of the company's board of directors, Prof. Waman Kale and others gave out all the necessary information, and testified to nothing being objectionable in the company's working, which they assured would become increasingly efficient and exemplary in the days to come. At the same time, they expressed regret that the simple disagreements within the management had become public. But just as every cloud has a silver lining, the appointments of the auditor, and the board of directors, were unanimously passed and the meeting concluded on a satisfactory note. The company had passed the litmus test which, in a way, proved beneficial. On the board of directors of this company established on the back of deposits of the middle-class, are luminaries such as Wamanrao Kale, Diwan Bahadur Limaye, Tambe, Rambhau Abhyankar, Baburao Salvekar, Sohoni, and Jagannath Maharaj Pandit, who would strive for the company's prosperity, and look after the interests of the shareholders. It seems certain that the

people of Maharashtra will help the company in every which way.”¹

This was the result of five years of relentless toil, and the almost single-handed efforts of the company’s managing agent, my father. After the meeting, he would have then gone, as per the tradition, to Alandi, to bow before Dnyaneshwar Maharaj and seek his blessings for the future. The next milestone was to convert the 250-ton factory into a 1,000-ton one. Naturally, he would have to face the attendant obstacles and difficulties that would surface along the way.

This was a slack period from the company’s point of view. The second world war was on, and thus despite the desire, the situation was not conducive for the company to grow. Right from the beginning, the British Government had taken an adversarial stance, and its policies were aimed at stifling the growth of the Indian sugar industry. There were only about 5-10 factories at the time, with a meagre capacity of about 300-400 tons each.

In its period of success, the company had to go through two difficult situations. The first was the ban on the production of jaggery imposed by the government. The machinery was capable of producing only 250 tons of sugar. The area under sugarcane-cultivation was a large one, with the ambition of increasing it even further. The excess sugarcane, which could not be crushed, was used to produce jaggery. But in 1943, the Bombay Government banned the production of jaggery, forcing the company to produce only sugar. The said order carried the signature of S. G. Barve, a secretary in the government. Though he strove to ease many of these restrictions after independence so that industry could thrive, the company faced losses due to his order at the time.

The second setback was the burden of producing food grains, which was in short supply due to the ongoing war. As the people in the Nira, Krishna and Godavari river belts had to eat American milo instead of sorghum (jowar), the government came out with a diktat making it mandatory for the sugar factories to grow food grains on the surplus land.

This hit Brihan Maharashtra really hard. On the one hand, food grains did not fetch a good price on the market and on the other, the cost of production was as high as that of sugarcane. Losses were mounting every year. If the balance sheet showed losses, the shareholders would be upset, and the trust of the depositors would be shaken. It is impossible to imagine what my father must have gone through, being caught between the devil and the deep sea.

Desperate to find a way out of this predicament, he established the Lakshmi Narayan Shetkari Sangh,² with my uncle at its head. Its brief was to cultivate crops other than sugarcane, thereby obeying the government’s

¹ in *Kesari*, dated January 30, 1940

² *Sangh*, meaning an organisation or association, in Marathi

order. He promised that the resultant losses would be compensated for once the ban on jaggery was lifted, the production capacity of the factory increased, and the company turned profitable.

Had he not started this venture, thereby showing a profit in the balance sheet and paying the dividend, Brihan Maharashtra, set up and owned by a Marathi man, would have fallen into the hands of some capitalist. Sadly, the narrow-mindedness of the Marathi man reared its ugly head, with his distractors making an issue out of this and literally tormenting him.

In the year 1945, the Syndicate wrote an amount of ₹1,679,219 against the Shetkari Sangh's name. This had been shown in the 'amount due' column in the balance sheet. The Syndicate would take the land back, and the concerned amount would be twice brought to account. The main condition of the contract was that at the time of taking land from the Sangh for sugarcane, the expenses incurred on account of erecting boundaries and fencing, fertilisers, and other things would be borne by the company. This was notified in the annual shareholder meeting of 1945 to the shareholders, who subsequently approved the report, balance sheet, and the profit and loss statement.

In this meeting, the incumbent president, Jagannath Maharaj Pandit declared, *"In the water deal signed with the Government of Mumbai, permission for producing jaggery from sugarcane is granted. In spite of this, a ban on the production of jaggery has been imposed under the Indian Defence Act. The ban, along with the problem we face due to our inadequate machinery, and the government's diktat to produce more food grains, has had an adverse impact on the company. It seems unlikely that permission to produce jaggery will be granted in the near future. Thus, the only option for the company is to order machinery with an increased capacity."*

It was decided to order this machinery at one go, instead of in instalments. Efforts towards that end, which had begun in right earnest, bore fruit, with the Government of Bombay giving concessions like providing water to cover 2,000 acres of sugarcane, leakage water, etc. 1,000 tons of sugarcane would now be produced daily. The license to import filtration machinery was issued. The new machinery would treble the sugar output to up to ₹60 lakh. The expectation was that this increased yield would translate into profits.

The government laid down a condition, however, that before placing the order for this machinery, the existing shareholders and their associates would have to buy shares worth ₹42 lakh. When my father informed the shareholders about this, they asked him to accept deposits instead of shares. As a result, my father ended up buying shares worth ₹8 lakh, for which he had to borrow money. He even gave a written assurance to some of the depositors, that if they were to convert their deposits into

shares today, he would convert them back into deposits once the new machinery arrived.

Naturally, company records showed a large number of shares in my father's name. This was enough for his detractors to make false allegations and kick up a storm, saying he forced the board of directors to do his bidding on the strength of his shareholding. Paying no heed to this, my father kept working towards his goal.

Just like 1939-40, 1950 also has great significance in my father's life. It was the year in which he realised the second part of his dream, that of setting up machinery capable of producing 1000 tons of sugarcane in Shreepur. This didn't cause him too much trouble, as he had already proven that a factory could stand without share capital, on the strength of deposits. Around this time, there was a deluge of deposits, in response to my father's advertisements in the *Kesari*. Deposits worth ₹60-70 lakh were secured, with this figure soon swelling to over ₹1 crore, and from this, the new 1,000-ton machinery was set up!

Just as the life of the first hereditary Peshwa, Madhavrao, was replete with struggles, my father faced similar challenges in the establishment of the Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate. But it made him happy and proud to have laid the foundation of industry in Maharashtra. It was in his nature to create challenges for his capabilities and intellect, and surmount them.

Financial difficulties and tussles with his detractors continued to dog him, but being an eternal optimist, he could see, far on the horizon, the pinnacle of Maharashtra's industrial success. His efforts continued unabated, with his 'treasurer' in Pandharpur standing solidly behind him.

When would the journey to the pinnacle of success reach its destination? This journey of numerous difficulties and pitfalls, seemingly insuperable detractors and serpentine turns refused to end. Just as one obstacle was overcome, another would rear its head.

But my father had a lion's heart. The king of the jungle fears no one, never begs for mercy, and provides for itself by virtue of its heroic exploits. My father, who idolised Napoleon – the emperor who had set out to conquer the world - was advancing with renewed energy, enthusiasm and self-confidence. On this journey, he must have thought –

*“Days will come and go,
Suffering will make way for happiness,
The mind will blossom, joy won't be diminished, Let us give
him the strength to fight destiny.”*

AGASHE PATTERN – AN APPEAL

My father's entire life – in which his good deeds often went unacknowledged – was a hornet's nest of sustained opposition. The honey bee and the hornet belong to the same species, but there is such a difference between the two! The honey bee is forever industrious, expending great effort flitting from flower to flower and gathering honey to stash away in its naturally beautiful hive. This beehive is a store of nectar, spreading happiness and joy, and is beneficial to human beings. But hornets are the exact opposite. The only joy in their lives is to sting. They care nothing about the suffering of others, subjecting even an innocent person to terrible agony by stinging without provocation.

Similarly, my father poured his blood, sweat and tears, toiled day and night, and by fair means, built this beautiful structure called Brihan Maharashtra. In a way, he used all his skills, capabilities and intelligence to create a beautiful honeycomb for the benefit of his own people, and the rest of Maharashtra, but the hornet's nest of detractors spread uncontrolled like a frenzy and stung at every opportunity.

I wonder if one's stars are aligned so! In his childhood, destiny denied him happiness by snatching away his father. He had barely recovered from it, when poverty came up as an adversary. But my father countered every opposition and continued to fight his life's battles.

While buying land for the cultivation of sugarcane, he faced opposition from some so-called enemies who belonged to the Saswad Mali sugar factory of Akluj. Their refrain was, 'What kind of factory will this Brahmin start?' Then there were the machinations of Chitale and his agents, of the Chitale jaggery factory, trying to instigate the farmers by spreading falsehoods. But my father and uncle ignored their designs, and overcame these difficult situations.

Some of the land was bought, some rented. The time to set up the factory was here. Shares were to be sold to raise the capital. People would insinuate, and make insulting comments about my father and uncle, as they travelled extensively to sell shares. One would say, 'Do you think of yourself as another Shivaji, setting out to uplift Maharashtra?', while

another would retort, ‘Starting a factory is not a Brahmin’s cup of tea.’

A good man is simply good; his goodness not affected by the other person behaving badly, or crossing swords with him. The following example from my father’s life proves it –

There was an argument with his uncle, Vishnu Kaka, over the land in Mangdari. The matter escalated into a full-blown fight. Since my father and uncle were younger to him, he would not listen to them. To resolve this dispute, the two brothers had to walk from Pune to Mangdari. They would have their lunch under the shade of a tree, and prepare to counter their uncle. But later, after his demise, the brothers gave all the support to his widow, Girija Kaku.¹ She was a good woman, very proud of my father, and loved us children very much.

This is only an example of a family feud, but the detractors in his Brihan Maharashtra career were on a different level altogether!

My father considered the Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate as his own big family, and looked after it like its patriarch. He was happier being at the factory than at the Pune office. There would be complaints, opposition, or some minor squabbles, right from the board of directors to the typist.

Mr. Paranjape, who had been very close to my father since his days in Karachi and had co-conceived the idea of the factory, quit the Agashe-Paranjape Managing Agency and joined the rivals Saswad Mali Sugar Works as a mere employee. This was the attitude of the Marathi man, who had little self-interest and hardly any daring, but envied the success of others! It was natural for a conscientious man like my father to feel sad about this betrayal. It was opposition in another form. After Mr. Paranjape’s exit, the onerous task of raising money in Pune fell to my father alone.

A feeling began to gradually take root among a few members on the board of directors, that since all the credit for the company’s success goes to Agashe Saheb,² he would get a major share of the financial gain too; they wanted their share. There even was an employee who threatened to take action if he did not get a pay rise. His name was Sant, but his attitude was anything but saint-like!³ This division sowed the seeds of unrest and turmoil for the future, something which tormented my father till the very end. Ever since the decision to start the company was taken, wherever one person put his hand up to tackle the existing difficulties, ten others would be ready to discourage him. This certainly was a depressing aspect.

It was no wonder that those who feared their monopoly and

¹ *Kaku* being the feminine form of *Kaka*; referring to the wife of one’s paternal uncle, in Marathi

² *Saheb*, meaning master, in Marathi

³ alluding to *Sant* being the Marathi word for saint

dominance would be curtailed by the company's success opposed its policies; what was unfortunate was those opposing for the sake of it, having practically nothing to gain or lose. This made the job of running the Syndicate an arduous one.

Since sensible and thoughtful people agreed with my father's outlook and policies, deposits were slowly trickling in. Aware of the fact that delaying the setting up of the company until the share capital was sold and sufficient capital raised would lead to serious losses, my father took the bold gamble of securing deposits at a very high rate of interest. Through this sale of the share capital and securing of deposits, the requisite amount was raised, and production began.

Just as things began running smoothly, people with selfish motives started sowing seeds of discord. My father responded to this, not as an owner-operator, but as a trustee. He reassured the people through advertisements in the *Kesari*. But he was all alone and had no one to share his troubles with. Being extremely brave and noble though, he never lost his bearings in the face of opposition, disappointments, or failures. In his life, he experienced happiness and satisfaction, along with other good things, and had an eye for beauty. He was altruistic and donated generously, not only out of compassion, but goodwill and noble intentions too.

Following the terms of the constitution of Brihan Maharashtra, my father gave a donation of ₹2 lakh for starting a commerce college, as soon as the company registered profit. He did not name it after himself, but as the Brihan Maharashtra College of Commerce. The intention behind starting the college was for industry in Maharashtra to progress, and the students to avail of a good education.

Another significant donation was the ₹1 lakh given to the Maharashtra Bhavan in Delhi. The building, which stands to this day, was built for people who traveled to Delhi to have a decent place to stay and eat. Kakasaheb Gadgil played a big role in this.

The third large donation was for the engineering college in Sangli. Initially, it was decided to name it Brihan Maharashtra. But my father said to Mr. Walchand Hirachand, "Since you are the one in a position to give money if needed, it should be named after you". Thus, it was named the Walchand College of Engineering, Sangli. My father would often remain under the radar in this way, which is easier said than done.

He thought of himself as a mere drop in this vast ocean of humanity and never shirked from performing his duty. He realised there was a greater satisfaction beyond material wealth that money could never buy.

He gave a lot of donations in his personal capacity too. He built a well in Pune's Navin Marathi School, in memory of my late brother, and named it the Ranganath Well; donated ₹10,000 to start the Kaushik Vyakhyanmala (a lecture series) to give impetus to the study of the Vedas;

gave a donation for building two classrooms in Pune's Ahilyadevi High School in memory of our maternal grandmother, who was a pillar of support as he grew up in her house. The company, for its part, donated ₹5000 to the Pune Marathi Granthalay (a library) in honour of our mother, for literature to flourish and people to get access to quality material. Several such donations have been given for a number of good causes. But the detractors criticised this too, making senseless comments such as, 'these donations are given only to seek acclaim'. If only they realised that a majority of these donations were made anonymously!

The reality was that since childhood, my father had seen poverty and need up close, and was well aware of their significance and impact. Often, a poor person who becomes wealthy seeks revenge on society, as if to get even for the treatment meted out to him back then. My father, on the other hand, wanted to ensure no poor person suffered the way he did, and thus generously, and often anonymously, helped numerous poor students and the needy. He would say, "If only I found the fount of money, I would make it freely available to the needy."

My father had a good lifestyle, and was always immaculately dressed. There was an atmosphere of affluence at home. My grandmother and mother, being efficient housewives, ensured there were no shortages. My father had rich taste, was generous, and did everything meticulously and selflessly. He had bought a car soon after he started practicing law. But his detractors accused him of being profligate with the company's money, and indulging in revelry. They did not lose a single opportunity of baiting him. Especially those who had been peripheral to the establishment of the factory only thought about how and when they would get their share of the bounty.

A look at the annual meetings of the company between 1943-48 reveals that people like Bhat, Tambe and Barve, who personally held only a couple of shares worth ₹50-100, masqueraded as if they carried the burden of the entire world, and criticised the working of the company. In every meeting, they would raise trivial questions, and try and create confusion amongst the shareholders and depositors by making irrational statements.

They envied my father's salary, commission, car, and above all, the respect he got as the company's owner. These vicious people also regretted the fact that they would not be paid any dividend. How could one expect these incapable people with devious minds to understand that capability is always respected? They conveniently forgot the immense toil my father went through in the first 10-12 years of establishing the company. Furthermore, the typist, Sant, left the company, and bringing shame upon his name, joined the opposition in a bid to strengthen it. My father's success was like a heart disease for his detractors!

Efforts to establish the factory on the prevalent 'Agashe Pattern' of deposits, had to contend with the opposition of Prof. P. S. Limaye and his friends, who cited theoretical and conventional economic policies in their

argument. They insisted a limited company could only be started with share capital; and that using deposits for this was unscientific. Since the company had no collateral, they believed they would be wiped out in case it went bust. Therefore, taking deposits of over ₹1 crore was both risky and unscientific.

My father replied to all these objections in great detail, and these problems notwithstanding, the company consistently soared to greater heights. Neither did any depositor suffer, nor did any shareholder lose money.

The aforementioned typist, Sant, alleged that ‘Agashe Saheb has siphoned off money to the tune of lakhs of rupees.’ It was natural for people, who only knew that he had shares worth ₹8 lakh in his name, to believe this. But the depositors and shareholders were infuriated upon learning that my father had an equal amount of debt, taken from these very accusers!

My father issued a statement to the shareholders in 1954, explaining how Tambe and Bhat had given him loans, and how he had to approach a Sindhi man called Pherwani to repay them. Bhat and Tambe said to my father, “If you assure a 10% profit, take the loan from us, pay interest and repay the principal amount.” My father took these loans in 1944-45, giving a hefty interest on it to Tambe and Bhat. Because he never pressurised the board of directors on account of the shares held nominally in his name, this scheming and alleging duo could remain on the board for 12 years!

In 1954, Tambe and Bhat, the very people making these allegations, gave shares worth ₹3,42,000 and ₹70,000 respectively to my father, asking him to transfer them to his name as they didn’t want to take the risk of keeping them.

Sant informed Mr. Pherwani, who had given a short-term loan to my father, “A businessman from Mumbai has filed a petition in the Mumbai High Court, asking for the company to be dissolved, as Mr. Agashe had not returned his money; I am telling you this in all confidence.” His advice to Pherwani was, “You are in danger of losing the money loaned to Mr. Agashe. Recover it at once.” Being an experienced businessman, Pherwani forwarded the letter to my father, pursuant to which the company filed a defamation suit against Sant, signed by the famous criminal lawyer from Pune, Mr. B. N. Bhide, and the issue died a natural death.

A great deal of fuss was being created, and a negative campaign run, that since Agashe Saheb loots the company, buys land, lives in luxury, drives fancy cars, and the company would soon fold up, he needs to be driven out. Even though my father’s life was spotless, an evil game of character assassination was being played by these selfish and calculating people. Sant wrote an article in the Prabhat newspaper, claiming Agashe

Saheb had distributed profit to the shareholders despite the company suffering losses.

Contrary to Sant's claim, this was not misleading, but in fact, assuring the shareholders that the company would ultimately become profitable. This assurance was the reason behind my father being able to secure deposits. He not only worked without any salary until the production began, but also signed a contract that he would not take any payment apart from his salary (such as commission on the profits) until such time as the shareholders got a dividend of 6%. If this is compared with contracts signed by other managing agencies, the value of my father's sacrifice will become evident. If only his detractors had the wisdom to understand his greatness!

Despite knowing the details of the Lakshmi Narayan Sangh contract, Prof. Limaye and Tambe raised the same questions in every annual meeting. This is what they had to say about it: "We find this payment of ₹17 lakh suspicious, and wish to see what light the government inspector can shed on it." The basic point though, was that there was an arbitration clause in the contract between the Syndicate and the Sangh, where the liability would be decided according to the arbitration judgment. Therefore, this contract did not come under the jurisdiction of either the government inspector or the police.

This reminds me of an unfortunate incident in the life of Madhavrao Peshwa. He was fed up of the disagreement with his brother. As soon as Raghobadada asked for his share of the kingdom, Madhavrao Peshwa angrily replied, "Don't you know this is the Chhatrapati's kingdom? We are merely its administrators." When it came to the crunch, Raghobadada could not defend the populace of Pune, but Madhavrao Peshwa personally enquired after them and began compensating them. Sakharambapu, who was at hand, said that the government treasury could not afford to pay such compensation. To which Madhavrao Peshwa replied, "Use all my personal wealth if required. A king who cannot defend his subjects has no right to it."

My father was fed up of the scheming and opposition of the very people he considered his own. Prof. Limaye and Barve voiced their concern about repaying the loans within the stipulated five-year period to the shareholders. They did not realise that the sale of sugar had reduced the burden of the deposits from ₹1.03 crore to ₹59 lakh, and that a further ₹59 lakh could be repaid within the next five years. Nor did they understand that once the deposits were returned, the payment of interest would cease, and the shareholders could be paid more than 10% profit. Had such unthinking people been in charge of the company's administration in the long run, both the depositors and the shareholders would have been ruined. These people just could not give up their greed. All the detractors were hatching a plan to sell off this profitable company to a capitalist.

My father was not afraid of any calamity. He knew difficulties

were bound to occur while setting up a factory. What hurt him was the fact that members on his own board of directors, despite knowing the ground realities, raised questions that created misunderstandings. He reiterated that the ownership of the factory was not his alone, but that of the Marathi middle-class. He believed God was only using him as a medium towards getting the job done, and that it was his duty to protect the interests of the depositors and the shareholders.

Just as Madhavrao Peshwa sacrificed his personal wealth for his people, my father established the Lakshmi Narayan Sangh for the benefit of the shareholders, and my uncle wrote promissory notes worth lakhs of rupees, saving the company from suffering losses. It is impossible to quantify the enormous amount of risk my father and uncle took, and the mental stress they underwent. They faced a plethora of difficulties, such as complaints made by the detractors to the courts and the government, the ensuing enquiries, confiscation of documents, and the efforts of Karamsibhai¹ to take control of the company.

The government appointed Mr. Deshpande, a representative of the Batliboi Company, to conduct the enquiry. Despite his unsubstantiated remarks against the company and my father, the government took no further action on the report. The matter even reached the Finance Minister of the time, Hon. Sir Chintamanrao Deshmukh. Once he came to know why, and under what circumstances, Lakshmi Narayan Sangh had been established – solely to ensure the survival of the company – he was convinced of my father's sincerity, the file was closed and the matter finally settled.

My father publicly disclosed the bitter truth that the Sangh was established purely for the benefit of the company, and his initial contract with the company, of compensating these losses in the future, was also accepted in the shareholders' meeting. The heavy burden of the past four years had finally been eased. This was a moral victory for him, which he considered a blessing from Lord Pandurang. To be humble in victory and patient in defeat was the mantra of his life. Alas! My uncle, the strength and courage behind all this, the man who had signed on behalf of the Sangh simply because his brother had asked him to, did not live to witness it!

Post 1950, my father got engrossed in the company's activities, and aggressive in the fight against his detractors. Thus far, the company had been struggling. The traditional belief, that such businesses cannot be built with deposits, had been disproved, and a new experiment successfully implemented. He would gently assuage the doubts and suspicions of the people, and give all the time necessary to satisfy the angry and disgruntled depositors and shareholders. He would explain to them how they would get a 10% profit once the company's 1,000-ton machinery arrived. Thus, the depositors never rebelled.

¹ Karamshi Jethabhai Somaiya, sugar industrialist and educationist (b. 1902 – d. 1999)

But when his own associates, envious of the fact that the Brihan Maharashtra Company was becoming successful, and my father a wealthy industrialist, started rising in revolt, he began paying them back in the same coin. He stated in an article, addressing such captious people, “Though the annual meeting is a ceremony, like the ‘Lakshmi Pujan’ (a Hindu festival worshipping the goddess of wealth), of sharing the success of the company with the shareholders, and announcing a 10% profit on their shares, some members celebrate this auspicious day by throwing the muck of false accusations.”

The scheming of the detractors showed no sign of abating. Most of the depositors and shareholders were unaware of the devious plan being hatched by Bhat (a board member), Prof. Limaye (an external expert) and others, of selling the company with an eye on the commission. Serious attempts were made to stoke fear among them, so that they would demand their deposits back, approach the courts and serve my father notices; all to create a perception that the company was on course for closure.

The detractors launched a three-pronged campaign; personal character assassination, creating fear among the depositors, who were the backbone of the company, and (once they began clamouring for recovering their money) instigating the shareholders to sell their shares. This third front was to be fought on the strength of money, which they got from a wealthy sugar industrialist, Karamsibhai, of the Godavari Sugar Mills. The detractors’ job was done. Karamsibhai’s wealth provided the tools of propaganda, to approach the courts, and issue pamphlets. How else, as Prof. Limaye himself admits, could a professor, drawing a paltry salary of ₹125, afford all this? It is a gross injustice, that the rich often take over businesses painstakingly built by others, by virtue of their money power.

But these schemes of the detractors also failed. There was a provision in the original rules of Brihan Maharashtra, that an approval for shares bought in a personal capacity would be at the discretion of the company’s board of directors. These shares could not be bought, or sold, in the share market.

The disinformation campaign run by Prof. Limaye and Bhat succeeded in creating some panic among the shareholders. As such erudite people cannot openly display their greed, they disguise it as the ultimate truth. Thus, they claimed this was not a fight for their individual shares worth ₹100, but rather a holy war to save thousands of middle-class Marathi people from ruin. They fail to realise however that they are mere puppets in someone else’s hands. They are enticed through falsehoods, and end up dancing to the tune of others.

The hands of this wealthy puppeteer were, Messrs. Bhamburkar and Company, a self-proclaimed economist in the field of industry, and C. G. Kale, a former engineer. Their communique highlighted that the company was suffering severe losses. In an urgent and private letter,

Bhamburkar wrote, “We are breaking this very important news that the company’s hidden losses amount to at least ₹30 lakh.” He went on to say, “We would like to inform you that, if you so desire, we could try and sell your shares at the initial price in order to protect your money.” On his part, C. G. Kale said, “Some responsible factory owners are willing to buy the old shares at their initial prices. It would be prudent to identify them and sell the shares to them. I would be able to facilitate the same.”

These two had become agents of Karamsibhai, whose role in this plot was not disclosed. Narubhau Limaye, the editor of Lok Shakti, and a well-wisher of my father, was offered a large sum of money to publish articles against the company, to which he replied, “If a company worth about ₹1-1.5 crore is suffering losses to the tune of ₹30 lakh, how can your patron pay the shareholders the original share price? Does he have more money than he needs?” Unable to make headway here, Bhamburkar approached Bhausaheb Hire, who too turned him down after getting a clear picture of the situation. The detractors thus lay exposed.

Narubhau Limaye once said to my father, “Since some newspapers write against you, why don’t you give them an advertisement or two?” My father replied, “I am not scared of such arm-twisting. I don’t need to give an advertisement in order to sell sugar”, and pointing to the photographs of Sant Dnyaneshwar, Sant Tukaram and Lord Pandurang, said, “See, my protectors are standing behind me.” He further added, “As far as the depositors are concerned, they have complete trust in me, which will not waver in the face of such propaganda.” He then placed a list of his depositors in front of Narubhau and said, “If even 3% of these people ask their deposits back due to a lack of trust in me, I will resign from the managing agency.”

This not only shows the trust the depositors had in my father, but also highlights the tremendous confidence he had in himself. After the demise of his brother, he continued to oversee the functioning of the company, but with a certain detachment.

When sugarcane, the raw material required for producing sugar, is grown in one’s own fields, extremely sweet and properly processed sugar of a fine quality can be produced, and the factory can make a lot of money. This theory became a reality due to the persistent efforts of my father and uncle. The barren, destitute land of Bhorgaon was transformed into green, undulating fields!

Presenting the report of a huge profit to the depositors and shareholders was to be the culmination of my father’s long and arduous journey. The term of the C. G. Agashe Managing Agency was also to end within a year. At this very juncture, his detractors were plotting to remove him from his position. This famous meeting took place on the 28th of June, 1953. It was a precursor to the demand for the managing agency to be discontinued at the end of its present term. Prior to the 1954 meeting, a

communiqué raising several objections about the company's functioning was sent to the shareholders, in a bid to create an atmosphere of distrust. The detractors were convinced this would lead to my father's ouster. People such as Sridhar Phatak, Jathar, Paranjape, Gupchup, Natu, Mahadev Vishnu Bhide, Kolhatkar, Parshuram M. Limaye, D. B. Barve, and even Wrangler Sir R. P. Paranjape,¹ were involved in, and signatories to, this mischievous plot. The address on the communiqué was – P. M. Limaye, Sheetal Bungalow, Pune – 4. That their efforts did not succeed is another story, and thanks to the government policy, my father's managing agency continued.

Despite the company stabilising post 1950, the issue of the Lakshmi Narayan Sangh; the complaints filed by Sant with the courts and the government and the ensuing investigations; the confiscation of documents; and the evil designs of Karamsibhai to wrest the profit-making company caused my father great anguish. It left him wondering whether this was the reward for his penance and sacrifices. The scheming and plotting of the miscreants however, did not stop.

These evil people spared no effort to break my father's spirit by inflicting pain and suffering. Blessed with a calm disposition however, he never lost his composure. On the contrary, he placed an advertisement in the Kesari, "*Now the 'Sade-sati' (a troubled period lasting 7 1/2 years, according to Hindu astrology) is over, the fatigue and stress are history, and there is joy all around.*" This is further proof of his equanimity.

Be that as it may, we siblings are troubled to this day, by the memories of his trials and tribulations.

¹ Sir Raghunath Purushottam Paranjape, Senior Wrangler (Mathematics) at the University of Cambridge (b. 1876 – d. 1966)

CREATIVE PUBLICITY AND ANNUAL ‘ARENAS’

Running a proper publicity campaign is crucial to the success of business or industry. It is an art to be able to etch your product on the minds of the consumers. Advertising is as important as the business itself, and demands a sharp intellect, creativity, and innovative and effective wordplay. In large-scale companies, this is a separate department with specially appointed experts.

Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate never felt the need for appointing such an expert or creating a separate publicity section. My father would write the advertisements himself, which apprised the depositors, shareholders and others of the company’s functioning and progress, and contained saintly sayings and references to dialogues from plays, thereby reassuring the shareholders and dispelling any doubts or misgivings. The language he used showcased his ingenuity, intelligence, and creativity.

In the beginning, my father advertised through his travels from one village to the other, meeting and talking to people. Even though Brihan Maharashtra was established in 1934, it took until 1939 for sugar to be produced and marketed. For raising the company’s share capital, advertisements signed by Mr. Vartak appeared in the *Kesari*. In 1937-38, my father made a success of the seemingly unpopular deposit-scheme. He explained all these things through advertisements.

The foundation stone of the company was laid on the auspicious day of Gudi Padwa (a Hindu festival) in 1938. In the months of October-November the same year, my father placed an advertisement in the *Kesari*, ‘*Neither the company’s sugarcane, nor the machinery, has been mortgaged*’, the reason being that the company was laying more emphasis on deposits than share capital. A. R. Bhat asserted that though this scheme was gaining acceptance, the deposits were unsecured and thus, from the point of view of the depositors, the company’s income and machinery should not be mortgaged. This advertisement was to clarify the same. Later, in 1940, it was stated that deposits would be stopped once the sowing was completed, and a photograph of the company was published along with the

advertisement.

As the sugar industry was still at the rudimentary stage in Maharashtra, it was necessary to give reassurances about the success and profits of Brihan Maharashtra. Through advertisements, my father published the figures of the profits made by the Kalamb and Belapur factories, and gave a public assurance of benefits of over ₹1 lakh. He was honest about everything, always looked after the interests of the depositors, and believed that once you condition yourself to think honestly, all the difficulties, conflicts, and problems get solved in a trice.

On January 14, 1939, a full-page advertisement featured several photographs of the company. On the 31st of the same month an advertisement was published, saying that the first season had begun, and the brand name of the sugar produced in this Swadeshi factory, established by the Marathi man on his own steam, was Shree. In effect, it said that a sack of sugar with a brand name depicting success and effort, had been offered at the feet of the Lord! It was an attempt at doubling the joy and enthusiasm of the depositors and shareholders who read these advertisements, which helped them keep abreast of the company's progress, with great interest.

Once the deposit scheme was approved by the board of directors, my father issued a spate of advertisements to attract capital through deposits. As he was a man of his word, the depositors trusted him completely, and thus, the stream of deposits flowed simply on the basis of advertisements.

One reporter wrote that my father had an innate understanding of the techniques of advertising and publicity. He had the art of silencing his critics and the inquisitive in a mere four sentences, using few but incisive words.

Here is an example –

*“THE NATION HAD A LION HEART,
I ONLY ROARED”*

The advertisement on January 11, 1955 mentioned how the lion-heart middle-class had raised capital worth lakhs of rupees without seeking any collateral, that helped to install the 1,000-ton machinery and kickstart production, and that the Syndicate would be free from their debt through the production of sugar.

*‘The desire of commission benefits the middle-class,
Some so-called experts are performing the un-Maharashtrian*

act of giving it away to a capitalist.’

This advertisement, while honouring the shareholders and the depositors, exposed the schemes of the detractors.

An advertisement aimed at exposing the actions of Bhat, a detractor, read –

“Let us see which Bhats (alluding to Brahmins, supposed to protect the cattle) have come to steal the cattle.”

1940 was a successful year for Brihan Maharashtra, with the machinery working perfectly. Success demands purity of the heart. My father had this quality in him and was thus successful. One of his advertisements was titled, ‘*Proud Maharashtra*’. Around the same time, a guarantee of producing sugar worth ₹12 lakh was given. His love for Maharashtra could be seen through such advertisements. Fortunately, his enterprise was such that neither toil nor difficulties could bring failure. He had great pride and confidence in his business. Another beautiful advertisement alluded to the confluence of three rivers –

*“The sword-wielding Marathas gave their land,
The rainwater, which crowned Shivaji’s forts of Torna and
Raigad, has been offered for the Syndicate’s sugarcane
by the government.*

*The middle-class, whose heart bleeds for
Maharashtra’s industrial development,
has offered capital to the Syndicate.”*

That the Syndicate would ride to success by virtue of this confluence was a bygone conclusion. My father, who acknowledged the contributions of every single person, was a cut above the rest.

To ensure that the depositors were not swayed by the efforts of the detractors, the advertisements became increasingly aggressive and forceful from 1950 onwards. This was published in the *Kesari* on May 23, 1950 –

“Kakasaheb Khadikar says,

*'The courageous will reap the rewards of wealth
The courageous will buy shares and give deposits to establish
the factory, Machinery worth ₹36 lakh could be acquired
because of the courageous
The courageous will help in building the empire. '''*

My father could write such advertisements owing to his comprehensive reading, contemplation, and study.

An advertisement was placed on May 30, 1950, to highlight the progress of the 1,000-ton factory –

"I am meeting you through this advertisement, as I was busy at the factory. Now that we can meet in person, I have let go of this support-engine. Deposits would be accepted, but without advertisements. I am grateful to those who bought shares and gave deposits through this medium."

He would periodically express his gratitude, and acknowledge the contribution of the depositors. He wrote on December 12, 1951 –

"Making a success of the sugar factory is not winning Swarajya, or realisation of the creator."

A sugar factory with the capital of land, canal-water and machinery, is a cash industry yielding a profit of at least 10%. This shows my father had no vanity, or ego of his capabilities. He was a straight and simple man, with a heart of a lion. The colour of one's heart is more important than the colour of one's skin, just as the fragrance of a flower is more important than its external appearance. Inner beauty is more important than external beauty, because it is immortal. Even after his death, the feelings we siblings have today for this kind-hearted man are of pride in his achievements, and respect.

He placed an advertisement on February 1, 1952 –

"The fatigue and stress are history, and there is joy

everywhere.”

This was because the factory was doing well now. Even so, the efforts of the detractors to discourage my father continued. They were jealous of his success as a managing agent. There was a clamour that the depositors would sink, and criticism that my father spends far too much on advertisements. The truth was that the sale of Brihan Maharashtra's sugar did not need advertising. But my father had to resort to it, to counter the propaganda of the detractors such as Limaye, Bhat, Barve and others, and to dispel the doubts and misgivings of the shareholders and depositors.

An advertisement of August 2, 1953 read –

‘Efforts should not be made to weaken a grand mountain’¹

The 1,000-ton factory got underway on the back of the capital raised by the depositors, and 96,055 sacks of sugar were produced. None of the depositors lost money. Though such explanations reassured the depositors, wasn't my father's energy being drained due to the troublesome detractors? Had these people not hounded him, he would have rendered greater service to Maharashtra. But who bothers?

Just take a look at this advertisement of November 3, 1953 –

*“Profit on shares is selfishness,
Donating through profits to institutions is the ultimate truth.”*

The company's constitution says that the balance amount, after distributing profit from the shares, be used for donations. This is where my father's uniqueness becomes evident. One cannot aspire to understand the true meaning of life, unless the mind is clean and pure. My father's life was meaningful, because his mind was clean and pure. His life's purpose was to try and bring happiness into others' lives, while maintaining simplicity of the heart.

In an advertisement on December 25, 1953, he says –

¹ as quoted in the *Dnyaneshwari*

*“Question: Who stands by you in times of difficulty?
Answer: No one stands by you in times of difficulty like a friend does.”*

This was an effort to clarify, and reassure the depositors, that the Syndicate was not facing any difficulties. Since a ‘production friend’ is similar to a human friend in terms of providing assistance, deposits worth ₹41 lakh had been returned, and none of the depositors lost money.

The advertisement placed on January 14, 1955, blew a big hole in the hired propaganda of the detractors, and exposed them. On January 4, 1955, Bhat, Sant and others had written a false and defaming article, saying that ‘the property of Brihan Maharashtra would finally be auctioned’. In response, my father declared that this spread of disinformation would be dealt with through legal channels, and published the details of deposits that were returned, thereby dispelling the doubts and suspicion that arose in the minds of the depositors. Soon after that, on January 18, 1955, he gave a large and detailed advertisement –

“Through sustained effort, you may get oil grinding sand particles, A mirage may quench the thirst of the thirsty, You may find a rabbit’s horn in the woods, if you look hard enough, But you cannot befriend a fool even for a moment.”¹

The Swadeshi movement was in full swing since 1905. Proud youth were espousing Swadeshi, insisting they would not eat delicacies made out of foreign sugar and asking for ‘Puran poli’, an Indian sweet instead.

1. *The Syndicate factory manufactures Indian sugar, and the business makes a 10% profit.*
2. *New 1,000-ton machinery has been installed in the Syndicate and the production of sugar has begun.*
3. *The middle-class consumes sugar worth ₹5 per month (in the year 1955), that is worth ₹60 per annum.*
4. *Giving a capital of ₹1,000 at 6% for the Swadeshi factory, is akin to taking an insurance policy worth ₹60 of sugar for a year.*

¹ quoting Vaman Pandit, Marathi poet and scholar (b. 1608 – d. 1695)

5. *Brihan Maharashtra boasts of more than 1 lakh middle-class people who are the proud owners of bungalows, wadas, orchards and businesses.*
6. *Even if 10,000 middle-class people contribute ₹1,000 each, a capital of ₹1,000 crore can be raised. We would not require a moneylender or a millionaire.*
7. *The managing agents of other companies were dissatisfied souls, always hankering for more. They earn higher salaries and commissions than those of the Syndicate.*
8. *The annual output of the Syndicate can go up to one lakh sacks. Even if the rate is pegged at ₹70 per sack, ₹70 lakh could be earned through the sale of sugar.*
9. *Discerning Maharashtra understands that the deposits are safe since the sugar business is making a profit and the production is on. New deposits come in and the terms of existing deposits are extended. Requests for deposits to be returned to pay for auspicious occasions, education etc. are honoured.*
10. *The Syndicate has ‘Kaliyamardan’ (taming of the serpent Kaliya, in Hindu mythology) to answer ‘Krishnadvaipayan’ (the birth name of Sage Vyasa, in Hindu mythology), but the matter of the report of government inspectors is sub judice. Also, trying to answer would be a waste of time, because the words of both, Bhartrhari (a Sanskrit scholar and writer) in Sanskrit, and Vaman Pandit (a Marathi scholar and poet) in lucid Marathi, seem to be in commemoration of the depositors and shareholders of the Syndicate – ‘But you cannot befriend a fool even for a moment’.*

This advertisement was a fitting reply to the detractor named Sant, who wrote against the Syndicate under the pseudonym ‘Krishnadvaipayan’ in the daily, Prabhat. This constant interaction, assuaging of doubts, and reassurances given to the depositors about the safety of their money, saw deposits upwards of ₹50,000 being made every day. It was literally pouring deposits. For the depositors and shareholders, my father’s word was equivalent to a Reserve Bank note with the signature of Sir C. D. Deshmukh! My father placed an advertisement on June 3, 1955, which underlined his indomitable faith in God –

"I have come to experience that God is extremely compassionate, He never ignores his devotee."¹

¹ quoting Sant Tukaram Maharaj, Marathi poet and saint (b. 1598 – d.1650)

In the same advertisement, he declared a 10% dividend and expressed goodwill, saying –

“Onward, onward, onward; may we progress so!”

He further wrote –

“CO-EXISTENCE AND NOT AGGRESSION”

This principle of peace is prevalent today, which says capitalists should not attack Syndicates supported by the middle-class. Along with all his other work, my father was compelled to contend with these enemies. Since advertisements were the easiest and most beneficial medium of communication, at least one advertisement was placed every week. On December 25, 1955, another big advertisement was given. The reason behind mentioning this advertisement is to highlight the scale of the opposition, and how my father came up trumps and ensured the company's prosperity. The distillery also was due to start in 1955. After the construction of its building was completed, he gave an advertisement –

“O son of Kunti, all that you do, all that you eat, all that you offer and give away, as well as all austerities that you may perform, should be done as an offering unto Me”

– *Shrimad Bhagvad Gita*

THE FRUIT OF HIS DEEDS AND SACRIFICE

In order to convince the middle-class of the benefits of sugar production for Maharashtra, a change of opinion, and a change of heart had to be brought about, and the capital remained secure. An interest and a profit of 10% was given on the capital, and because ‘wealth of knowledge is the highest form of wealth’, it was resolved to offer a part of the surplus profit to educational institutions.

"The capital was raised, and a thousand sacks of sugar were produced every day.

1943-1955

After these twelve years, the profit would definitely rise to 20%, and the resolution of offering part of the surplus profit to educational institutions would come to fruition.

Where There Is A Will, There Is A Way

WAIT AND SEE”

Later, the stages of progress are mentioned –

“At the beginning...

Official capital ₹15 lakh

*Machinery crushing 250 tons of
1,000 tons sugarcane daily
Production of 50-55,000 sacks of sugar*

...and Today

*Official capital ₹1 crore Semi-electric machinery crushing
of sugarcane daily
Production of 120,000 sacks of sugar”*

A table of deposits is given. Similarly, the sales figures between 1939-1955; octroi paid to the government on the sugar; tax on sugarcane and water paid to the government in Bombay; interest paid on deposits; profits given to the shareholders and donations given to the Brihan Maharashtra College of Commerce; total deposits and deposits returned; all this was published in the advertisement, along with a photograph of the factory.

Gratitude is expressed towards the depositors and shareholders for their cooperation – the reason behind the company’s success – with a plea for them to continue showering their affection on the Syndicate. Being a strong advocate of education, my father wanted to provide maximum assistance to educational institutions. He believed the purpose of education is to foster a healthy mind, which gives the strength to face any adversity. His thinking was appropriate, without which appropriate acts are not possible.

But his detractors never understood him; or rather they had draped a veil of hatred on purpose. In any event, my father never succumbed to them. Due to his sincere efforts, and God’s blessings, words like ‘failure of efforts’ or a ‘successful retreat’, did not exist in his dictionary. He had realised the oneness of God and the self and thus, pure joy flowed from his heart. Being a model of virtuousness, there was no room for disappointments and failures. The fragrance of flowers flows only in the direction of the wind, but the fragrance of virtuousness manifests in all directions. This is why the fragrance of his fame has spread all around. Important advertisements thereafter appeared on January 18, February 22, May 7 and 21, in the year 1956.

On January 1, 1956, R. B. Bhat wrote a letter to my father, “One financier is willing to invest ₹28 lakh in shares and ₹75 lakh in debentures in the Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate. If you approve, call a meeting of the board, where I will present my proposals in detail.”

Karamshi Somaiya was the financier Bhat was referring to. Once my father and the directors categorically stated that the factory, which belonged to the middle-class, could not be handed over to Karamshi, Bhat's opposition intensified. In order to gain control of the company, Karamshi decided to buy off the shareholders' shares, and to put pressure on them, appointed C. G. Kale, a retired Chief Engineer of the P. W. D. in the Maharashtra government and now General Manager designate, to oversee the sale of these shares.

The Inquiry Officer of the Batliboi Company, W. H. Deshpande, sent a 400-page report to the government in 1954. My father sent an equally detailed written response to it, rubbishing the statements made in Deshpande's synopsis.

This advertisement appeared on January 18, 1956. The next, given on February 22 is an important one, conveying the appropriate thought to Karamshi Somaiya –

*“Onward, onward, onward; amass this treasure of books,
Everyone, everywhere, will be happy.”¹*

Syndicate was the virtuous wealth of the middle-class –

“Onward, onward, onward”

Everlasting flow of money to the shareholders and depositors of the Syndicate, who always gave hope and financial assistance at the time, and who delighted in the success of the Syndicate –

*“The un-Maharashtrian act of selling the shares of such
eminent
shareholders of the Syndicate has been done by the agent,
Kale, in the September of 1954
The Syndicate has been established on socialistic principles.”*

Even Somaiya would agree that the shares bought through opposition propaganda should be returned to the rightful owners.

¹ quoting the *Dnyaneshwari*

*“The Syndicate would now certainly operate with a 20% profit
WAIT AND SEE.”*

The next round of advertisements, which turned out to be my father's last, was published on May 7 and 25, 1956 –

*“Even if you heat gold over and over again, it still maintains
its
characteristic glow.”*

Just as gold shines with renewed glitter despite repeated heating, so did my father's capabilities and virtues shine in the face of the opposition's fire.

The annual meetings of the Syndicate were as popular as the advertisements. Many of them were stormy affairs, with the detractors creating a ruckus, and my father responding and ultimately overpowering them.

In 1940, the company's annual meeting took place on January 23. True to the nature of the Marathi man, doubts and suspicions were raised. But my father's idea of taking deposits was a success.

The report of this meeting was published thus in the Kesari –

“So as to apprise the shareholders of the company's affairs, it was proposed to reconvene the meeting adjourned in the month of December, wherein the company's balance sheet, report of the board of directors, and the profit and loss statement, would be made available. This was unanimously accepted. On behalf of the board of directors, Prof. Wamanrao Kale and others disclosed all the necessary information and testified there was nothing objectionable in the company's affairs, which they promised would be exemplary in the days to come. The appointments of the board of directors and the auditor were unanimous, and the meeting concluded on a general note of satisfaction. The board of directors consists of such eminent personalities as Wamanraoji Kale, Diwan Bahadur Limaye, Jagannath Maharaj Pandit, Rambhau Abhyankar, Baburao Salvekar, Sohoni, and Tambe, who would strive to ensure the prosperity of the company and secure the interests of the shareholders. It seems certain that the people of Maharashtra would assist the factory in every way possible.”¹

¹ in Kesari, dated January 23, 1940

The next important meeting was in 1943. Another article published in the *Kesari* said,

"In the annual meeting of 1943, the board of directors of the Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate in Pune resolved to give a generous donation of ₹2 lakh to the Commerce College of the Deccan Education Society. This amount would be utilised for constructing the college building. It was also announced that the college would be named, the Brihan Maharashtra College of Commerce. Since there was a provision for giving such donations in the Sugar Syndicate's original manifesto, there was no question of any objections being raised. A provision was made to give the shareholders a substantial rate of interest on their shares, and a sum of ₹50,000 was set aside to provide facilities and amenities to the workforce. The Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate, and the managing agent, Mr. Chandrashekhar Agashe, need to be congratulated for setting an admirable precedent, of industrial organisations assisting in social service, without any discrimination whatsoever, through this donation. If only other industrial institutions in Maharashtra follow in Brihan Maharashtra's footsteps, social work in the state will never be short of finances."

This was an endorsement of my father's vision and policies, and a pat on his back. In the same meeting, the partners approved the donation.

In the shareholders' meeting of 1945, the president, Mr. Jagannath Maharaj Pandit, said, "In the water deal signed with the Government of Mumbai, permission for producing jaggery from sugarcane is granted. In spite of this, a ban on the production of jaggery has been imposed under the Indian Defence Act. The ban, along with the problem we face due to our inadequate machinery, and the government's diktat to produce more food grains, has had an adverse impact on the company. It seems unlikely that permission to produce jaggery will be granted in the near future". Thus, the only option for the company was to order machinery with greater capacity. It was decided to place an order for machinery with a capacity of 1,000 tons. The government, however, had laid down a condition that the shareholders and their allies need to buy shares worth ₹42 lakh. When this was conveyed to them, they asked for deposits to be taken instead. In the end, my father himself bought shares worth ₹8 lakhs. The loan for this was given by Bhat and Tambe themselves, at a very high rate of interest. And yet, they raised an outcry about my father's shares in every annual meeting in an attempt to misguide the shareholders, made false allegations, and continued to raise irrelevant queries. In my father's words, they continued to throw muck at him.

The annual meetings were dominated by those seeking personal benefit, those with bookish knowledge, or those nursing some grudge or the other. Meetings of other companies would be dominated by several issues of some merit, but those of Brihan Maharashtra echoed with the childish statements of the detractors.

The annual meeting of 1947 was attended by a shareholder called V. N. Date, who said, “I am attending the Brihan Maharashtra meeting for the first time. I expected the meeting to be conducted the way it has been so far. Though this is my first time here, I have been present at other such meetings, and find a marked difference in the conduct of those meetings and this one. This company is not owned by one person; it belongs to Brihan Maharashtra. This is an exemplary company, the pride of Brihan Maharashtra, and it is indeed unfortunate that its affairs should be conducted in this manner. The report of the board of directors and the audited accounts, which have been tabled for your approval, do not warrant so many clarifications. This is pure childishness, and the discussion on these resolutions should hereby cease.”

Despite this reprimand, Barve didn’t think he was being childish at all. Sensible people though, thought otherwise.

This is how the meetings of Brihan Maharashtra were conducted. There would be a barrage of leaflets, criticism-laced articles in the newspapers, and comments and accusations about my father’s conduct. But he would stand firm and silence the detractors. Sant, who wrote an article criticising my father in the daily, Prabhat, under the pseudonym of Krishnadvayipayam, was reminded, through an advertisement, of how Lord Krishna had overpowered and subdued the serpent, Kaliya (an episode in Hindu mythology). However, despite being defeated by Shree Krishna seventeen times, and humiliated by my father’s resolutions being approved in the general body, these Jarasandh, Shishupal and Rukmi (Hindu mythological characters) would advance brandishing their weapons of criticism.

In the 15th annual meeting, of 1949, the President Dr. V. D. Phatak said in his speech, “It was not easy to instil love for industry in the Marathi man, who only ever wanted to find a job. There is a world of difference between practical and bookish knowledge. Until now, industry was taboo for the white-collar Marathi class. They are loathe to suffer the hardships of business and industry, and are unnerved by even the smallest of challenges. A number of people are responsible for creating misunderstandings among them.” Dr. Phatak’s sermon had no effect whatsoever on Prof. Limaye, Barve and others, whose queries continued unabated in subsequent meetings too.

My father then gave a detailed response through this statement –

“In 1945, the Syndicate earmarked an amount of ₹16,79,219 for the Sangh, which can be found in the ‘inflow’ section of the balance sheet. The Syndicate would reclaim the land, and the said amount twice brought to account. As per the primary condition of the agreement, the expense accrued by the Sangh on account of erecting boundaries and fencing, fertilisers, etc would be borne by the Syndicate. The shareholders have been apprised of this condition in the annual meeting of 1945, following which

the profit and loss statement, the report, and the balance sheet has been approved by the shareholders.

In September 1945, my late brother and premier partner of the company, issued a promissory note of ₹16,79,219 to the Syndicate as per the above condition, and on this amount, gave between ₹1,68,000 to 2,32,000 as agricultural income from 1945 to the present balance sheet. After the death of my younger brother in 1952, one of the directors insisted that I issue a promissory note of that amount. Accordingly, I informed the directors that I would issue the promissory note once the fair price for sugarcane was decided, and all the plantations, including sugarcane, given for a period of 10 years. Also, I would pay the Syndicate ₹2 lakhs out of the ₹16,79,219, and ₹1 lakh from the agricultural income, so that the Syndicate, with a share capital of ₹26 lakhs, could use these three lakh rupees to give a 10% profit for a period of 10 years; and the shareholders would get ₹100 on their shares of the same amount. If this is acceptable, I would quit the managing agency and my seat on the board of directors. If you so wish, and the company so requires, I would be willing to work as a consultant to ensure sugar extract of 11% or more.”

As per the above, there is a traditional reason behind the convention of sugarcane cultivation. There was no merit in the allegations of Limaye and Barve, that my father earned profit at the expense of the Syndicate. But how would their inferior intellect grasp this? Their incessant queries continued. The argument, which came up in every annual meeting, was whether the factory should operate with share capital or, in case it was inadequate, deposits should be taken. Limaye, a professor of economics at the Fergusson College, was strictly against taking deposits.

It was an established fact that despite Brihan Maharashtra securing deposits of over ₹1 crore on the back of my father's personal trust and giving a profit of 10% on the shares, the people of Maharashtra preferred to give deposits with a rate of interest of 9%. And yet, A. R. Bhat maintained that the company's earnings were mortgaged against the bank loans and debentures, and that the deposits were not safe.

Prof. Limaye raised questions based on his views that a factory, established primarily on deposits, should never take loans from banks or any other institutions; the deposits should be considered as the unwritten security of the depositors and one's moral responsibility. In the 17th general body meeting of 1951, Prof. Limaye's questions were answered by the chairman, auditor and my father, who placed an advertisement which read, “*The crop worth ₹50 lakh is ready, and the Syndicate owns land worth ₹5 lakh. No burden has been created by mortgaging the estate anywhere, and thus, there is no question of the depositors being betrayed.*”

In response, Prof. Limaye said that since the 17th Annual Report showed the factory and land had been mortgaged, the claim made in the advertisement was not absolute. My father, who was the managing agent,

clarified, “Prof. Limaye’s contention is that, by taking loans keeping the buildings and the machinery as collateral, the depositors’ money has been converted to unsecured deposits, which amounts to betraying the depositors. However, this is not true.”

Refusing to back down, Limaye said it was in black and white that the land was mortgaged. The President replied that the land of the sugar factory is primarily understood to be the land under sugarcane cultivation. A clarification regarding the burden created by the old machinery was also given in the meeting. The Škoda company raised the price of the new machinery by 30,000 pound sterling and tied the delivery to this payment. My father replied that the payment would be made on delivery, and until then, work would be carried out on the old machinery, which was also purchased from Škoda, not through fresh deposits but from the share capital accumulated ten years ago.

Prof. Limaye could have spoken to my father at any time, to get his doubts cleared. But when you oppose for the sake of opposing, what good can come of it?

The 17th meeting concluded, and the date for the 18th meeting was June 23, 1953. My father’s managing agency was to finish its term in 1954. The detractors though, were conspiring against its continuation since 1952.

In the meeting of 1953, Dr. V. D. Phatak averred, “Mr. Limaye, all your efforts to discredit the company will come to naught. If only you show a little patience, things will be sorted out. Even if you succeed in closing down the company, you will hardly get anything. Just look at the report of June 27, 1953. The company has returned deposits worth about ₹30 lakh in the last seven to eight months. Why do you feign ignorance in spite of knowing the truth?”

In the same meeting, an eminent shareholder gave a speech that said one thing, but meant the complete opposite. “The shareholders would have been disappointed because the balance sheet of the company showed a loss. But today we need to look ahead and think about the future. People are apprehensive as they know of the discord among the board of directors. If it is not competent, appoint a fresh board of directors and managing agent, who would be willing to give up their selfish interests. No one should act against the interests of the company.” He was of the opinion that this company had prospered on Maharashtra’s account.

This was nothing but a call for my father’s ouster from the managing agency. In reality, he had worked incredibly hard and made several sacrifices to make the company prosperous. The company had brought Maharashtra into the limelight, not the other way around. The Syndicate had become the pride of Maharashtra! Those who were making false allegations and statements, and had suddenly developed a pretentious love for Maharashtra, were the very ones who preferred to play safe, did not

raise the share capital, and showed a willingness to keep deposits rather than buying shares, in spite of the board of directors being comprised of eminent people. These people printed leaflets and tried their utmost to sell the company to a capitalist.

At that time too, my father made the following disclosures at meetings and through advertisements –

“Machinery capable of producing 1,000 sacks of sugar each day has been installed. In the absence of any government order, there is no compulsion to produce the loss-inducing food grains, and a 10% profit is a certainty. There is no danger to the depositors. There are wealthy people willing to buy shares worth ₹60 lakh or more of this profitable company. But if this sale of shares is approved for one affluent person, the Brihan Maharashtra factory, owned by the middle-class, would fall in the hands of a capitalist, who would then appoint his own board of directors. That is why the company does not approve this sale. The carrot of commission was dangled before me too. Anyone who makes the company so profitable would, at least in private, earn a commission. But why go down this path? What about the Syndicate’s mission of helping other public institutions, after distributing a 10% profit among the shareholders? And thus, whether for the sake of commission or some other selfish interest, the company cannot be handed over to a capitalist by going against its stated goal.”

Where the detractors were concerned however, all this fell on deaf ears. But in 1953-54, the original contract, of the company absorbing the losses of the Lakshmi Narayan Sangh, was approved in the shareholders’ meeting. All the company’s accounts and reports were approved too. The burden taken upon themselves by my father and uncle was eased. This was a moral victory for them. Unfortunately, all this happened after my uncle’s death!

There were rumours that the next meeting, in July 1954, would be a stormy affair, since the term of my father’s managing agency was coming to an end. But the resolution for extending the term was never tabled, and since it was not put to vote, the president, Jagannath Maharaj Pandit said that a special meeting would be convened for it later. My father also said the same, and declared that the main matter of contention was over.

Still, the detractors alleged there was something cooking. They believed that once the annual report and accounts were approved in the meeting, the opposition would be sidelined, and all the decisions would be assumed to have the shareholders’ seal of approval. Thereby, they stood their ground, and demanded that the leaflet issued by fifteen members be placed on record. These included Sridhar Phatak, Jathar, Paranjape, Gupchup, Natu, M. V. Bhide, Kolhatkar, P. M. Limaye, D. B. Barve, and even Wrangler Paranjape. But after the President’s speech, the torrent of opposition, ‘muck-throwing’ in my father’s words, fizzled out and the report of 1953 was approved. Prof. Limaye’s sub-proposal got only five votes,

while the rest was passed with a chorus of ‘approved, approved’.

The biggest surprise of the meeting was Barve, a regular critic and opponent, saying, “I commend and thank Mr. Agashe for the capabilities he has displayed, and the tremendous amount of hard work he has put in over the last twenty years.” My father retorted, “A person should always be consistent in his views.” In this meeting, all but five members agreed, and proxies of shares worth ₹34,000 of the absentee shareholders came in.

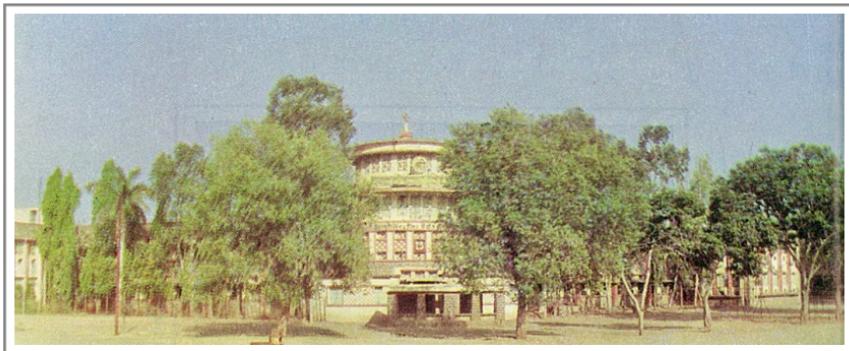
Around 1954, my father often said he would leave the managing agency, if anyone was willing to give his word, and a guarantee, of returning the people’s deposits. But the detractors did not want to take any such responsibility. All they were interested in was the profit. Since the 1,000-ton machinery had arrived, the balance sheet from 1954 onwards was expected to show a profit of about ₹40 lakh. My father’s prediction, that ‘the sugar factory would rain money’, was about to come true.

The resolution he got passed through the board of directors on August 18, 1954, for the existing managing agency to continue until a new one was appointed, was an example of his intelligence, advocacy skills and in-depth study of the law. Legally, the managing agent could be appointed up to January 15, 1957. The board of directors decided to send this resolution to the government’s Department of Companies, seeking permission for the same. This was tabled and passed unanimously in the ensuing special meeting, which saw a massive turnout.

The detractors should have seen reason by now, but didn’t. They made every effort to sell the company to Karamshibhai. They misguided the shareholders and bought their shares through C. G. Kale. However, the original resolution of the company prohibited Karamshibhai from buying the shares, and efforts made by him and his cronies to wrest the company came to naught. Truth and honesty had triumphed!

But my father’s life was coming to an end. His body was wasting away, bit by bit, and when the victory came, he was not alive to savour it.

Even in 1955-56, my father gave a 400-page reply to a 400-page report by the Batliboi company, rejecting all their false allegations and claims. That report also was expunged from the official records. Just when all the struggle and suffering was coming to an end, time played truant. Devious people such as Prof. Limaye, Barve, Kale, and others, attempted to hand over this efficiently-run company to a capitalist like Karamshi himself. My father fought these ‘enemies of mankind’ with a do-or-die spirit!



MY FATHER'S IMMORTAL MEMORY –
THE CHANDRASHEKHAR AGASHE COLLEGE, SHREEPUR
CIRCA 1992



THE BRIHAN MAHARASHTRA COLLEGE OF COMMERCE, PUNE
– HIS MAGNANIMITY IN NAMING IT AFTER THE COMPANY,
RATHER THAN HIMSELF
CIRCA 1992

AGASHE SAHEB – DEDICATION PERSONIFIED

The Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate office is on the second floor of the Commonwealth building on Lakshmi Road, where it still stands.¹ For years, this was my father's main place of work. Due to his indomitable faith in God, there was a small temple in the office, which had a silver salver, bowls, turmeric and vermillion powder, a drinking vessel and pot, a flower vase, and a beautiful idol of Lord Pandurang.

He would spend a few moments in reflection and contemplation before the idol, prior to sitting in his chair. Many people were curious and wondered about his faith in God. Probably because incidents involving relatives, friends, and enemies had often tested him, Lord Pandurang had become his companion for life. He had put up several pictures in the office, not as a hobby, but out of a sense of devotion. Mr. Chaphekar has written beautifully about this –

“Agashe Saheb put up pictures of Dhruv-Narayan as a symbol of unwavering devotion; of the descent of the Ganges into Lord Shiva's hair to advocate Bhagirath-like effort (the legendary king who brought the Ganges to the earth); of Shivaji (right in front of where he sat), the inspiration behind him taking support of the middle-class in business and industry (just as he had done with the Mavlas to realise his dream of Swarajya); of Swami Samarth, who preached that along with authority, a doer, a purpose and effort, God's blessings were necessary; of Justice Ranade, who equated service to humanity with service to God; and of Lokmanya Tilak, who professed acting without expectations, as in the Bhagvad Gita. Then there were photos of Dnyaneshwar Maharaj, the inspiration to seeking knowledge; and of Lord Pandurang, the omniscient, wish-fulfilling tree of divinity for the devout. He would begin work only after humbly bowing before these photos. This environment had a great bearing on the success he achieved in life.”

¹ as of 1992; the Syndicate is addressed at 242 Chandrashekhar Agashe Path, Shaniwar Peth, as of 2022

My father revealed the secret behind selecting these pictures to Mr. Chaphekar in 1936.

Since he took all the responsibilities upon himself, he could never adhere to the routine and discipline of the office. On an amusing note, he put up a plaque behind the chair he sat in, ‘The needy has no common sense’. If someone came to him with frivolous complaints, he would try to explain things to him; but if the person refused to see reason and began making caustic comments, my father would point to the plaque above him. This often happened with depositors who were victims of a misunderstanding.

As my father entered the office, the sugar production chart would be placed before him. He would then go through the morning newspapers, taking stock of the bouquets, brickbats, and other news. The mail, consisting of applications for deposits, and letters from those seeking deposits, would also be kept before him.

Several business merchants would come to the office to collect sugar from the factory. Among these were the renowned Vitthaldas Sakhalchand from Pune, Govindram Shobharam from Sangli, representatives of Vora and Co. from Akluj, Ramchandra Motiram Fade, and about five to ten merchants from Pandharpur. While dealing with them, it was important to establish good relations, and make policy decisions to ensure sustenance of it all in the long run. My father was so adept at it, that even today, these merchants talk proudly of his business ethics.

A major factor in sugar production was the quality of sugarcane and sugar extract. My father paid very close attention to both of these. He looked after the crop, as one might look after a patient’s medication.

Once, the agriculture officers made a complaint about the sugarcane crop not getting enough fertilisers and oil cakes. As the echoes of this complaint reached the board of directors, the Chairman himself visited the fields to find out the truth. When he realised that the fertilisers cost more than ₹2 two lakh, he understood my father’s predicament.

It was a simple case of expenditure exceeding the share capital. And yet, my father always managed to arrange for the money. He would borrow money from the business merchants themselves; the crop would be fertilised; and once the handsome crop came up, the bank would grant a loan against it and things would be normal again.

My father responded to every letter of complaint in a gentle manner. If a depositor spoke angrily or in a raised voice due to a misunderstanding, he would be escorted to the factory by one of the staff, shown the fully-grown crop, and convinced about the healthy state of the business and its potential to become bigger. As seeing with one’s own eyes had a greater impact than reading about it in some advertisement or article, the agitated depositor, far from asking for his deposit back, would increase

its term, and even give a fresh deposit.

Others found this expense on a single person wasteful, but my father considered the depositor to be a living advertisement that was far more valuable than any clarification in a newspaper. This happened to a depositor called Patankar. Though financial difficulties were a daily affair, my father had mastered the art of managing his staff and others who visited the office.

To get the best out of his staff, my father selected them based on their qualifications and worthiness. Also, without allowing their expectations to rise too much, he would instil belief in, and loyalty towards the office and the factory through his fatherly treatment. He reprimanded them on the odd occasion, but it was always in the company's interest and for the betterment of the concerned individual.

If an oil cake merchant, or someone else came to collect their dues and money was tight, my father's sweet-talking, and their trust in him, would result in them dropping their demand to be paid, and instead placing a new order.

My father and his staff in the Pune office would often work until eight or nine in the evening, after which he would leave for Bhorgaon. Officers at the factory recall how his arrival generated a feeling of respect and reverence all around.

While the rich and affluent held him in high esteem, the common farmers and tenants at the factory treated him like God. What was even more astounding was that people branded as criminals, like the Ramoshis and Pardhis found in the Solapur district, also bowed before my father.

Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate was a large organisation, but no one ever took anything that did not belong to him. Often in the harvesting season, sacks of sorghum and gram would be lying in the open, with only a couple of watchmen keeping guard over the fields and the warehouse. Even today, people say there won't be another man like my father.

He and my uncle were very fond of cattle. After attaining prosperity, they had about 500 bulls and 400 cows at the factory. Milk from the cows would be delivered to every section officer's house, while milk from the 200 buffaloes in the cowshed would be sent to the dairies for sale. The cattle were fed toor roughage and oil cakes. If a cow happened to moo in my father's presence, he would feed it a bundle of grass. My uncle had a favourite bull, who would go to him when called, and get petted.

The sugar and other supplies required for the factory were ferried in bullock carts. The bull-festival is celebrated with great fervour in the fifth month of the Hindu calendar. The 500 bulls from the cowshed would be decorated and taken in a song and dance procession to the fair. At times, my

father and uncle would also participate in the festival, keeping an eye out for attractive bulls. I remember the cattle at the factory being beautiful. People from the adjoining cluster of villages would flock to this festival. My father was extremely enthusiastic, and there was hardly anything that didn't interest him.

He would take a walk in the fields in the morning. The land on which sugarcane, cotton, food grains and vegetables grew was either rented or bought. In the beginning, my father took a round on his bicycle. Heads would turn seeing this dynamic personality in his 40s riding a bicycle. During these rounds, the needy would come to him with their complaints and demands. My father was generous at heart. Of the four parts of the cotton field, he would give one part free to the buyer of the crop.

To ensure maximum output in his fields, he would create competition among the section officers. The fields were divided into ten sections. He would praise and reward the officer who had the largest output in both, the Khodwa and Adsali varieties of sugarcane. He always appreciated the good in others and suggested improvements in a subtle manner. He would try to understand a problem in a particular section, and instruct the accompanying officer accordingly.

Land and agriculture were my father's favourite topics. As the car turned in at the factory on reaching Indapur, he would say to the person next to him, "My dream is to see green fields extending for miles from here." He knew this factory, situated on the 21st fork and supplied with water from the Bhatghar Dam, would go on to become huge and require thousands of tons of sugarcane.

At the foot of the Bhatghar Dam, Veer Dam was to be built on the Nira river. Several blocks of sugarcane were going to be sold. In anticipation of getting those blocks, he bought land at Velapur and Malkhambi. There was opposition to this too, but he told the owners who would lease their land for a thirty-year period, "Those who sign a lease in this Shravan (a Hindu month) would get rent for that year, along with ownership of the standing crop." Farmers mired in debt were paid advance rent for the next two to three years. Those facing domestic issues were given loans of up to ₹3,000. This convinced the farmers that this Brahmin from Pune was not here to exploit them, but to usher in development and enrich their lives through the factory, and they always supported the Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate.

After his round of the fields and meeting the farmers, my father would go to the company guest house, which was known as 'Kakancha patra' (Uncle's shed), where the brothers would sit and talk about work and take important decisions.

My father would always say, "Once the blueprint of the factory is ready, I am going to divide it into agriculture and sugar production. I will

buy a large piece of land, convert the people with me in this journey into farmers, and spend my later years as a happy farmer in this land of Lord Pandurang.” God though had other plans, and my father’s wishes remained unfulfilled.

Once at the factory however, his attention would be focused on the percentage of juice and the extract of sugar produced from the sugarcane.

A critical article appeared in the *Kesari*, purportedly written by an expert, to which my father gave a detailed reply saying –

“In northern India, every 100 tons of sugarcane yields 9-10 tons of sugar, while in Maharashtra, the figure is 11 tons. This is the sugar extract. The price per ton for this sugar is ₹262. This means that the manufacturers in Maharashtra earn ₹525 more per 100 tons of sugar, which can be used to buy fertilisers. To make a comparison, they have more quantity of milk but less cream, leading to a lesser quantity of butter, whereas we have lesser amount of milk but more cream. That is why, a factory extracting more than 11% of sugar would be more profitable.” About the varieties of sugarcane, he writes, *“In my experience, the yield of the H. K. and E. O. J. varieties is about 40-50 tons per acre in Maharashtra. If the industry in Maharashtra is able to maintain this per acre yield of sugarcane, along with the 11% extract of sugar, it has nothing to worry about.”* This opinion, expressed by my father in 1956 – about 36 years ago – is an example of his in-depth study and foresight. He was, in fact, predicting today’s exponential rise and progress of the sugar industry in Maharashtra.

As soon as he entered the factory premises, his feet would turn towards the laboratory. Estimating the amount of the factory’s sugar extract and thinking about ways to increase it, he would often contact the production research institute of the time, in Padegon. In a particular period, the factory had extracted up to 13.2% sugar from its sugarcane.

Research at the institute in Padegon is ongoing. This firm discovered the C. O. 419 and P. O. J. 2828 varieties of sugarcane. Maintaining a high standard of sugar doesn’t depend only on the variety of the sugarcane, the percentage of sugar in it, and the laboratories; only if every cog in the wheel works perfectly can the optimum amount of juice be obtained from the sugarcane, processed and sugar extracted. The market price of sugar depends on the size of the crystals and its whiteness. It goes without saying that my father paid close attention to every stage of this process.

His vision, of setting up a 1,000-ton factory, was realised. Interestingly, this limited company, which had come up with the assistance of the farmers and the middle-class, could actually be called a cooperative. One can say it laid the foundation, in terms of its principles and working, for the sugar cooperatives that are in existence today, and thus, it would be appropriate to address my father as a visionary in this field.

The machinery and technical division of the factory was an area of learning and instruction for my father. Though a lawyer by profession, his knowledge in other areas left even the experts dumbfounded. Every expert or graduate doesn't go on to become an industrialist. People who set up large businesses are not always well-educated. But though they may not hold an academic degree or qualification, they possess the intelligence required of an engineer, chemist, etc.

My father not only was a graduate, but also possessed the intellectual maturity required to start a factory. Mr. Chaphekar reminisces, "Agashe Saheb paid very close attention to every aspect. He never spoke rudely to anyone, and had complete trust in his officers and employees. If someone failed to think independently in a difficult situation, he would mutter to himself, 'So many employees, but not one of any use'."

Once, a copper file in the machinery got damaged on the eve of the crushing season. It needed to be taken to Mumbai's Richardson Cruddas company for repairs. The company would charge ₹6,000 upfront, and deliver the supply of files after six months. Since the season was only three months away, there was a real dilemma.

Chaphekar suggested they try to repair it themselves, and asked if it would be okay if one of the files got damaged. My father was very impressed, as he had always wanted someone to use their brains and tackle a problem head on.

Chaphekar and his subordinates resolved the issue of the copper file in a matter of 45 days. My father instantly gave him a reward of ₹2,000, which he duly distributed among his subordinates. My father could get angry and disappointed with people, but would also heap fulsome praise for putting in effort. He said to Chaphekar, "You have repaired this to international quality," to which Chaphekar promptly replied, "They are people just like us. Don't we know what is to be done? It's only a matter of getting an opportunity." My father laughed at this heartfelt statement.

Where business was concerned, he lamented, "Why can't the Marathi people do business like the Marwaris and Gujaratis?" This always troubled him.

While the machinery at the factory was being set up, or when a machine was in operation, my father would stand before it for hours. He insisted on supervising every little thing, which did cause a few sparks to fly.

The opinion of the experts and their way of working was orthodox, while my father liked to think outside the box. One banked on theory, the other on practical results.

My father's plans about the factory buildings and residences didn't always match those of others. A difference of opinion made him angry, and

he would ask for the construction to be demolished. But it was momentary. He would either agree, if the concerned person explained things to him calmly, or convince the concerned officer of his point of view.

There was once an issue in the mechanical division. Godbole, a chemist, pointed out that the sugar extract was not sufficient. My father read several books, studied the subject and suggested improvements, which solved the problem.

The establishment of the factory, the machinery, and the buildings were the responsibility of the concerned contractors, with my father supervising the whole thing. The factory needed many experts and learned men. But solving the delicate issue of recruitment put my father's skills, generosity and utility to the test. He specifically recruited Chaphekar, a courageous, fearless, and at times, blunt officer with an independent bent of mind.

Chaphekar says, "It was a joy working alongside Agashe Saheb. He treated me like a member of the family. He had such charisma, that people were willing to do anything he asked. It is rare to come across such a great person. He even employed the relatives and children of the farmers who lived there, according to their capabilities."

The sugarcane belonged to the factory. Its plantation and cultivation were done by the factory; but on the ground, the employees were the owners of that land.

Farmers living in the region would come to work in their bullock carts. The bulls used for agriculture-related work would ferry sugarcane and the sugar produced from it. The factory, which gave full-time employment to farmers who were otherwise without work eight months of the year, proved to be an antidote to the poverty in Bhorgaoon.

Since my father's vision was for the farming and sugarcane production to be of the highest quality, one sees 'Chandrashekhar' (Lord Shiva's name) reflected in the memories of Gangal and his associates, from the Department of Agriculture. Mr. Chandrakant Waghmare speaks about my father being in the habit of studying everything that he took up in great detail.

He strove to ensure sugarcane farming would be of a high standard. It was a time when the farmers had just been introduced to the urea fertiliser. Oil cake was the only fertiliser used at the factory. Urea worked very fast; the crop would start growing within a week. Therefore, my father started using urea through a method called the 'Rapid Chemical Method'. He instructed the estate manager, Mr. Bhandarkar, to build small embankments along the sugarcane crop, dig small canals along these and release water in them, along with the fertiliser provided by him. He decided to try out this new fertiliser, and not content with just issuing oral instructions, said he would be there in person to supervise it.

News of my father's impending visit saw a flurry of activity. A road was constructed, and Bhandarkar and others waited for his arrival. As soon as he stepped out of his car, my father checked the condition of the crop, and was satisfied only after surveying the entire field.

At the time, banks gave loans against the standing crop, and for this urea-induced bumper crop, he got the amount he quoted.

He wanted guests, depositors and shareholders to be able to see sugarcane fields right from where the factory limit started. For that, molasses from the factory would be spread along the canal to create land suitable for sugarcane plantation and water would be given to the sugarcane. Thus, from the moment one stepped onto the factory premises, swaying fields of green sugarcane could be seen. This was his desire, and a part of his advertising technique too.

My father thought things through and through. He employed sons of the soil, so that people from the region would get work. The auditor often remarked there were more employees than required at the factory, which of course my father knew. An indirect result of his generosity was that a Brahmin, who had come all the way from Pune to Malshiras Taluka to start a factory, was considered a godsend by the people. Two things feature prominently in his policies – appointing the right people for the right job, and for them to be courageous, fearless, and even blunt at times.

He considered his status as an owner secondary to the interests of the company, but if an expert or an ignoramus were to show misplaced arrogance, a termination notice would be served the same evening. Normally, he was softer than wax, but only up to a point. As he treated everyone with affinity, there was no question of caste-distinction. An example of this is that no one caused him any trouble on account of being a Brahmin, in the riots that broke out after Gandhi's assassination in 1948.¹

The staff at the factory was excellent. My father scouted these people, retained them and made the factory successful. R. D. Joshi, a double-graduate, worked for 34 years and retired at the age of 73. Along with him, people like Messrs. Pendse, Kaka Upalikar, V. S. Limaye, Bhate, Bhaskar Velankar, Ganu, Natu, Chaphekar, Mukundmama Gokhale, Bapusaheb Thatte and many others, served the factory with utmost dedication. Later, Messrs. Pendse, Rabde, Wakankar, Joshi and Patwardhan worked in the Pune office.

As the factory was always cash-strapped, getting work done from the staff was often a challenge. But by paying the employees half their salary – since it was not possible to pay full salaries for up to four months at times – and providing grain for their rations and other essential items, the

¹ assassinated by Nathuram Godse, a Chitpavan Brahmin from Pune (b. 1910 – d. 1949); of the same ilk as the Agashes.

difficult task of securing the staff's loyalty to the company was achieved. This could only be done by Chandrashekhar Govind Agashe, my father.

Despite being tied up with factory-related work, he never missed a trip to Pandharpur to worship Lord Pandurang. It was a place of peace and rest, and of boosting his self-confidence. In the beginning, he would go whenever he visited the factory. But later, around 1950 onwards, he started going every Wednesday. Even if he reached late, the priest would keep the doors of the temple open for him. Since he loved to see Lord Pandurang with a crown on his head, the priest would facilitate it. He would stand motionless, for long periods, by the eagle-pillar, seeking the Lord's mercy and blessings. He would almost enter a state of meditation, a trance.

Everything we do is often below the level of our consciousness. There are two states of the human mind. First is the conscious mind, where the ego is dominant, and we say 'I am doing it'. The second is the subconscious mind, characterised by an absence of the ego. Since my father acted in this state, his mind could reach the exalted level of becoming one with God. Whenever he returned from this state of 'beyond the mind', his mind would become quiet, he would find the way, and get down to work again.

Both, he and my uncle, idolised Lord Shree Ram of Mangdari, and set certain goals.

As prosperity came to the region of Bhorgaon and Shreepur, the people were often reminded of Sant Dnyaneshwar's verse –

"It is indeed a golden day."

Someone must have blessed my grandmother so –

*"A son will be born to you, whose fame will spread far and wide,
The earth will turn to gold, golden from every side.
Every inch of the earth will become holy by the touch of his feet,
Purifier of the sinners, the merciful one, in your house, Lord Vishnu, you will greet."*

MAMA SAHEB & MAMI FROM THE WADA

There was a large wada opposite the ancient Omkareshwar temple in Pune's Shaniwar Peth. It had a massive door, like the Delhi Gate, so broad that a Mercedes could drive through it. It had a wicket too. As you entered inside, on the left lived one of the owners, Mr. Chitrav, and on the right, the other, Mr. Bandunana Dev. The two owners shared an amicable relationship.

Further inside was a tiled house, which was our home. My father stayed there on rent. As you entered the door, there was a long verandah. It had a swing, on which we swayed and sang as we grew up. Two steps up from the right corner was a vestibule, my father's sitting room. There was a telephone in a small room in the verandah. In the vestibule, cotton sheets would be put on the floor, upon which beautiful, expensive carpets would be laid. Cushions and bolsters would be kept against the wall.

My father would sit on a small mattress, with a pure white sheet draped over it. There would be a small, square table in front of him, on which he would read the manuscript and other books, and do his writing. On one side of the wall, on a shelf, were photos of Sant Dnyaneshwar, a laughing Chinese Buddha, other gods, and my grandmother.

All the business discussions, sugar deals, Vedanta-related talks, manuscript-reading, thinking, contemplation and interactions with the children would take place in the vestibule. It was similar to the durbar of the Peshwa of the olden days. All sorts of people such as scholars, depositors, shareholders, and others would be present.

Further inside was the middle room, where my grandmother used to sit. Since she had lost use of her legs, she could hardly move around in the house. She was strict, had a booming voice, and was feared by everyone. She was in charge of the affairs of the house. My father never went out of the house, or town, or started anything, without first bowing before God and then before her.

In the Vishnu temple in the house, the ritual of early morning prayers was, and still is, a regular feature. My grandmother would attend it. She knew a lot of devotional and other songs, and was an excellent cook.

She carried out her duty of looking after the family to perfection.

As was the tradition in those days, many rituals were practiced and Gods worshipped in our house. Many Brahmins were treated to feasts and wedding ceremonies held in this room, which also happened to be our dining room.

A festival would be celebrated in the style of the Peshwas. My father, who would mostly be away on work, made it a point to be home for Dussehra and Diwali. We siblings were thrilled to have him eat with us. There would be a footstool in front and behind, a silver plate, a metal lamp, rich clothes, ornaments; we would be thoroughly pampered.

Beyond the middle room was the kitchen, our mother's fiefdom. She would be in the kitchen for most of the day. Though there were cooks, food would be prepared throughout the day.

My father had a sister, and two brothers, of which one had unfortunately died. Therefore, this became a family of three siblings.

My paternal aunt, who had set up house in the middle room, had two sons, Dada and Bapu, and a daughter, Mainatai. Since they addressed my parents as Mama and Mami, we siblings also began calling my parents, Mama and Mami.¹

Mama got married to the Gokhale jewellers' daughter in 1914. My uncle, Narayan Kaka, never married.

Though life was generally good after marriage, my parents did not have children for the first twelve years. They had their first child in 1926, a baby girl named Leela (Tai to us).² We were a total of 10 siblings, 7 sisters and 3 brothers. One of our brothers, Ranganath, born after Tai, died at the age of 12, which devastated my father. I was born next, followed by Sushila, Jagdish 'Pandit', Vimal, Sarla, Dnyaneshwar, Neela, and Shree 'Shyamala'. It was a large family compared to present times. But since most Brahmin families had 6-7 children in those days, we had no reason to feel different.

As Tai was the first born, she was pampered a lot. She was adorable too, fair and tall with a straight nose, smiling face, and a pleasant, impressive personality. She loved her younger siblings, and was always inclined towards helping others. She got married at the age of 19, to Mr. Vasantrao Mehendale, who lived close by. He was an officer in the Forest Department. He too had a fine personality, and was a handsome, upright and fearless officer.

Tai actually managed two households at a time. As Mama passed

¹ Mama and Mami, the respective masculine and feminine forms of the word, referring to one's maternal uncle and his wife, in Marathi

² Tai, being the term for elder sister, in Marathi

away suddenly, she looked after us siblings and our mother too. Her new family was also a large one, but she carried out her responsibilities ably. All our relatives were in Pune. Therefore, whether for a wedding, a sad occasion, or when someone was in trouble, Tai's advice was always sought. She was very fond of learning, and completed her M.A. along with her elder daughter, Rohini. She had the knack of getting disinterested kids to study. And they would pass too!

There was nothing she didn't do for Jagdish and Dnyaneshwar. After my father's death, she took over the mantle of finding marriage alliances for my sisters. Despite being a daughter, she assumed the responsibility of a son. One could say Tai was our 'caretaker-government'. She went about doing her duty, oblivious to the opinion of others. Unfortunately, she passed away five years ago.¹

It is funny that though we were siblings, God had not made us all alike. They say all five fingers on a hand are not the same; I was like the little finger in that. Where Tai was beautiful, I was average looking, had a dark complexion and was of average height and build; in short, average all round. But what could I do? I am just grateful for what God has given me. Instead of pursuing higher education, I opted for a course in painting. In 1953, I got married to Mr. Bhupendra "Rajabhai" Karandikar, from Dahanu. On the plus side, or maybe because luck smiled upon me, he was better than me in every aspect. He formerly had forest-related businesses, but now owns salt pans and other small enterprises.

Sushila, born after me, was a mischievous child who revelled in teasing and making fun of me. She was strong, good-looking, intelligent and smart. Proficient in the arts, she has completed her B.A. She was the one who would attend on my father the most, looking after his every need. She often took care of the financial deals too. Mama was most fond of her. She got married however, after Mama's death, to Keshavrao, son of Mr. Sahasrabudhe from Barshi. An engineer and a builder, he is good-looking and well-mannered. Thanks to his calm demeanour, this blunt and outspoken sister of ours has also calmed down.

Whenever Mama went out of town, he would return with beautiful sarees. She loved the colour white, and being Mama's pet, always got the sari of her choice.

Mama pampered us all. He never held a grudge for siring too many daughters. He gave us all a good education and instilled the right values.

Jagdish – whom we called Pandit – was younger than us sisters. He was funny and playful since childhood, but after Mama's death, shouldering the responsibilities made him a serious and thoughtful person. He studied up to inter-science, but had to quit his education to take over the

¹ Leelatai Mehendale (née Agashe; b. 1927 – d. 1987)

responsibility of Brihan Maharashtra. He was a handsome man, with a unique manner about him.

Our household has a legacy of motherly and brotherly love. Both my bothers showed our mother a great deal of respect. In an attempt to fill the void created by Mama's death, Pandit showered immense love and affection on Dnyaneshwar. He never let any worries from the outside world enter the house. Thus, the atmosphere in the house was always a happy one.

Vimal and Sarla are very sensible people. The former is a B.A. L.L.B. (just like our father), while the latter is also a graduate. Vimal¹ is married to Dr. Khare's son, Srinivas, from Pune, a top-level officer in the Shipping Corporation, while Sarla² is married to Mr. Bhide's son, Neelkanth, who also hails from Pune, is an M.Sc. P.H.D. and owns a paint-manufacturing factory. The striking thing about these two sisters was that, despite being younger, they never fought among themselves, and were thick as thieves right from childhood. Both of them were fond of reading, and of the arts.

Dnyaneshwar, Neela and Shyamala were very young when my father died, and got very little of his company. Dnyaneshwar³ is married to Rekha, from the Gogte family. Pandit however, never married. Neela is married to Dhananjay Khare, a merchant navy officer, while Shyamala is married to Mr. Karve, an officer in Telco. Dnyaneshwar was born with a twin, our sister Mukta, who did not make it past a few months after birth. Dnyaneshwar, Neela and Shyamala grew up in an affluent atmosphere, as things had settled down during their childhood. Even though they live in luxury now, there is no arrogance or ego. The values our mother instilled in us left no scope for ego to creep in.

My grandmother, who lived with us for a long while, was like a guru to my mother.

My mother – my mother was affection and love incarnate! She was extremely hard-working and did a lot for everyone. My father would pamper us. We only had to make a wish for it to be granted. But our mother kept things in proportion, ensuring we didn't get spoilt. She was against the notion of doing something despite knowing it was wrong, which was fair, because balance is essential in life; it is the golden virtue!

Though there were cars in the house since our birth, she insisted we walk to school. Because college was far from the house, we were allowed to use a bicycle. Her logic was that as a student, one should remain simple and be willing to work hard.

¹ Vimal Khare (née Agashe; b. 1937 – d. 2021)

² Sarla Bhide (née Agashe; b. 1939 – d. 2007)

³ Dnyaneshwar Agashe (b. 1942 – d. 2009)

The elders in the house had to be shown respect. She hated anyone talking back or behaving childishly. At meal times too, she saw to it that we happily ate whatever was served. She only allowed clothes according to the custom of the times, and disliked fashionable or loud clothes. Mama Saheb would mostly be away on factory-related work, so the responsibilities of instilling the right values and looking after our education and health fell to our mother, who shouldered them excellently well.

In those times of peace, my mother would be bedecked with ornaments, and wore excellent sarees. Wearing a nose ring, and watering the tulsi (basil) plant every day, my mother looked imposing and beautiful because of her radiance. She was the Lakshmi of our prosperous house. When she wore rich and expensive sarees and ornaments on festive occasions, she certainly looked like Goddess Lakshmi. Though Lakshmi is called fickle, my mother certainly wasn't so.

She was strict by nature, but also courteous. In our house, religious practices and charity were generously followed, but she never opposed them. My father would say to her in jest, "You daughters of the Gokhale family are misers." But somewhere down the line, frugality was required to balance my father's Sant Tukaram-like magnanimity, and provide for such a large family.

My mother loved reading. She would find time amidst her busy schedule to read the Dnyaneshwari, Dasbodh, Amrutanubhav, and other texts. She was fond of the arts and crafts too. She would knit, sew and make bag items. A skill of hers no one was aware of, was poetry. I remember a letter she had written in verse to my maternal uncle, Dr. Gokhale. My father's life was a happy one because he found the perfect partner in my mother. It is not easy being the wife of a great man. You have to often suppress your likes and desires, do certain things as a duty to society, and behave bearing your husband's greatness and stature in mind.

A remarkable thing about that era was that women, in spite of looking after such large families, never appeared bored; words like 'tension' or 'mood', did not seem to exist in their dictionaries. Whatever the reasons may be, it was true that my mother was an extremely enthusiastic woman. Celebrating important dates and festivals, looking after the children, being hospitable to guests and visitors; even after all this, she never looked bored.

She was devastated by Mama's sudden death though. There were five daughters of marriageable age, and two young sons. She knew little about my father's business affairs.

Many developments took place after Mama's death. Some people from the company approached my mother, and offered a sum of ₹1 lakh to the family, in exchange for relinquishing its rights. It was no surprise that the detractors smelt an opportunity here. But in this moment of crisis, my mother's courage, fearlessness and determination shone through. She said,

“These are not the hands of beggars, but the hands that give; hands of generosity. We don’t need your charity; we demand what is rightfully ours.”

Such was our mother! She lived for another twenty seven years after my father’s death. She gave all her children both, fatherly and motherly love and affection. Jagdish and Dnyaneshwar looked after her with great love and care. She lived in luxury, and in a glorious environment, in the palatial bungalow Jagdish had built after the Panshet floods. She got her daughters married, celebrated all festivals, and looked after her in-laws. She did not let anyone feel my father’s absence. She forever worried about Jagdish though, since he did not marry.

Dnyaneshwar got married to Rekha Gogte. The Gogte family too is well-known, good-natured and courteous. Rekha, the daughter of the industrialist, Mr. Vasudev M. Gogte, is beautiful and extremely polite.¹ Her father’s family was smaller than ours, and more reformist.

There would be a large number of people coming and going at our house including us sisters, our children, and other relatives; my mother’s strict religious observances, and traditional practices would be ongoing; yet, Rekha willingly became a part of all of this, with a great sense of understanding, and without hurting anyone.

My brother, Dnyaneshwar, also had taken over several responsibilities, and made a name for himself. But she is equally at home on that front too. Presently, she has joined him in the industrial sector, and with the manufacturing of Nelson sauce, jam, and jelly, has given us a glimpse of her capabilities. My father’s legacy of love for industry, and willingness to work hard to achieve success, is a matter of pride for all of us.

Both of Dnyaneshwar’s sons are good-natured too. The elder one – Mandar – will become an engineer this year, while the younger one – Ashutosh – is gaining proficiency in sports, along with his college education. Our niece – Sheetal – is busy preparing for her 10th standard exams. Despite being the only daughter, her heart beats for the poor, and she displays the ancestral qualities of love and respect for elders.

What can one say about Pandit and Dnyaneshwar? People treat them like Gods, as they did my father. They treat their employees with love, just like my father did, maybe a tad more. Showing affinity, or treating employees with humanity, cannot be learnt, it has to be inborn.

Whenever my father came to Pune, he would have morning tea with all of us. He would jokingly refer to it as the ‘round table conference’, and participate in our jokes and chatting. He never lost his temper with us.

Even while chatting, he would speak in such a way that, without realising it, good values were instilled in us. He would narrate instances

¹ of the Gogte *Gharana* (House) of Belgaum, Karnataka; established c. 1860

from the Dnyaneshwari, or Sant Tukaram's works, in a language we could understand. He even played cards with us sometimes. If someone dealt a dishonest hand, he would say, "No one will cheat." This was his way of teaching us to always speak the truth. He would teach us the Ramraksha (a hymn in praise of Lord Ram) and ask us to recite it, to improve our Sanskrit pronunciations and to make us aware of Lord Ram's greatness. He was, of course, very fond of learning. Since he faced several difficulties in his student days, he wished for his children to have a good education and excel.

As it got very cold in Pune in the winters, a bonfire would be lit in the vestibule, around which my father, my uncle (at times) and the rest of us would sit and chat. My uncle and Mama would reminisce about their childhood, or talk about the factory. My grandmother would be there too.

Dada Sane, Dr. Leela Bhagwat's father, was my uncle's friend, and often visited our house. Then, they would talk about the company's annual meetings, or narrate amusing anecdotes about the embarrassment of the detractors.

Many people came to my father for various reasons. Mr. Govinddas Narayandas, a sugar merchant, Vasishamm, a businessman from Mumbai, writers and scholars came. Sometimes a poor student, people seeking a donation, or staff from the office came. As they talked in the vestibule itself, we often overheard their conversations. The upside of this was that, at a young age, we could understand the behavioural nuances of the businessmen, quotes of scholars, and the problems of the poor, among other things, without having to go into the outside world to experience that. Attention would be paid to everything in our neighbourhood.

My father tried to solve every problem anyone faced, and would help generously in matters of religious practices. Every year, in the month of Vaishakh (2nd month of the Hindu calendar) a puja of sandalwood paste would be offered in the Omkareshwar temple. People in the vicinity would grind the sandalwood into paste and make an idol of Shankar out of it. In the evening, a beautiful puja would take place. At night, His Holiness Sonumama Dandekar would recite a scholarly kirtan (narration of a religious idea or story, set to music, and accompanied by instruments) which we went to hear, along with my father. As he had studied the Dnyaneshwari himself, and achieved mastery over it, he liked listening to Mamasahab Dandekar's elucidative kirtan of the Dnyaneshwari. After that, coffee would be served at our house to about three hundred people.

Right from childhood, we were used to seeing everything being done on a grand scale. Every marriage ceremony in our house was lavishly celebrated. Along with being prosperous, we were enthusiastic, like my father. Therefore, every function, big or small, would be well-decorated.

Pandit was enthusiastic too, and though unmarried, would celebrate on behalf of others. My paternal aunt's children, Dada, Bapu and

Mai, were similarly enthusiastic. They loved Mami and she loved them back. We cousins were very close, and their company made our childhood an enjoyable one.

Both of my maternal aunts lived in Pune. My paternal aunt's daughter, Mai, the two maternal aunts, Gangu and Yesu, and our mother had formed a group – a foursome. My mother and Mai were so close that there was no space for a third person to come in-between. Gangu Maushi¹ never felt disappointment or regret about anything; she was contentment personified. Yesu Maushi was intelligent, enthusiastic, and taught others to find happiness in everything, but on rare occasions, bottled her grief and showered praise on others. It was imperative they attend every function at our house. My father was extremely appreciative of Mai. Like him, she was patient, prudent and tolerant.

Dada, his wife Vatsala, and Bapu, had great respect and affection for my father. They have rendered a great service to members of our house. Bapu was very fond of me. On my insistence, he has even braided my hair in childhood. Such is the collection of memories!

Mama would come home from the office by around eight thirty in the evening, have a snack or a glass of milk, and sit down to read the texts. A square table in the sitting area in the vestibule, with texts like the Dnyaneshwari, Gurucharitra, or Amrutanubhav kept on it, and incense burning, spreading its fragrance all around; this was the atmosphere in which Mama read with intense concentration. Seeing him like that, momentarily there would be a strange revelation, as if divinity was present itself. It is difficult to find the exact words, but it felt grand and magnificent!

His work, and his faith, were in plain sight; there was no artificiality or extravagance. Ramkrishna Paramhans, Yogi Arvind, and Swami Vivekanand were his oases of faith on the path of spirituality, while Lord Pandurang and Sant Dnyaneshwar were his deities on the religious path. He would sit in meditation and often go into a trance. All his dealings had a spiritual side to them and thus, his uniqueness would stand out. Since he had studied in detail about spirituality, and meditated, his standing and stature was at an exalted level, like that of the saints. But not everyone appreciated his greatness. Those with a narrow, limited bent of mind didn't understand it, and never will.

Of late, he had started going to Pandharpur almost every Wednesday. People think bathing in the Chandrabhaga river, seeking God's blessings, and partaking the offering made to Him, is the ultimate duty. They forget, however, that God appeared before Pundalik (a mythological figure, who took great care of his parents) because of his service towards

¹ *Maushi*, being the term to refer to one's maternal aunt, in Marathi

his parents, and do not realise that service to one's parents is higher than service to God. But my father served his mother, just as Pundalik did, and treated her like God.

Such was my father, who would go to Pandharpur, stand still by the eagle-pillar, close his eyes and try to become one with Lord Pandurang, speaking to him internally about his problems. He was truly blessed by Lord Pandurang, for his problems would be addressed. Atheists would find this laughable, but it was true.

Once, facing financial difficulties, he was standing by the eagle-pillar with closed eyes. After a while, a bamboo merchant, who had pawned his wife's ornaments with the only intention of helping my father, came and gave him ₹1 lakh. One can clearly see God's hand here. What else is the grace of God, if not this?

The respected Narubhai Limaye tells a devout person's story, about God's grace and help in times of distress –

A man was walking by the seaside. His footprints appeared on the sand. Looking down, he saw another set of footprints besides his own. Being pious, he believed these belonged to God, who was walking with him. But then he saw a break in God's footprints, and realised that those were the exact moments of strife and struggle in his life. Becoming one with God, he asked, "Oh God! While walking with me, where do you disappear in times of difficulty? Why can't I see your footprints then?" The man then imagined someone laughing and speaking. His inner voice told him, "Look closely. Where there is a break in the footprints, yours are missing. The footprints you see are mine. In times of difficulty, I was carrying you on my shoulders."

Mama's experience was not much different than this. Due to his indomitable faith, whenever he prayed to God in times of difficulty, Lord Pandurang would carry him on his shoulders, and tread the impassable path.

A man of immense faith, Mama ran the company with great determination. My uncle (Narayan Kaka), who was contemplating retirement, died in the September of 1952. Losing his dear brother, who was very close to him, had been with him in good and bad times, and fought life's battles alongside him since childhood, created a big void in his life. But Mr. Sabnis became a brother to Mama, took over the responsibilities, and cared for him. Be it meetings, company-related work, or travel, he stood behind my father till the very end. After my father's death, he provided great support to Pandit too, and looked after our family.

Compassion for the poor was an inherent trait of my father's personality. A book-store owner was facing financial difficulty. He came to my father with his problem. My father helped him out by buying books worth about five thousand rupees. Then there was a cloth-merchant, whose bundles of white cloth got wet and stained in the rain. He requested my

father to buy the cloth. He had suffered a severe loss, and just to help him, my father bought the cloth, and distributed it among the poor. An enterprising young man developed a machine to make chapatis. Being in need of money, he approached my father. My father gave it to him and said, "I don't want my money back. Develop the machine and bring me two chapatis." This was his way of helping and encouraging others. However much I write about my father; it would never be enough!

We accept life has its ups and downs, but what does one say about the harassment and torment he suffered on account of his detractors? It was true that his childhood was full of troubles, but the mind becomes numb at the memory of all the needless difficulties he faced till the very end of his life.

Though he lost his father early, he had his mother with him till he was 63. My grandmother had predicted her death eight days before it happened, and died on the exact day she told my father she would.

He got an excellent life-partner in my mother, and a Lakshman-like brother. His sister was big-hearted, and helped countless people despite her modest circumstances. Mr. Rajabhai Karve recalls that my paternal aunt helped him a great deal in his struggling days, and even fed him.

Mama was blessed with three sons, and even though his elder son passed away, Jagdish, and Dnyaneshwar (considered to be Sant Dnyaneshwar's blessing), fought against all odds and achieved success.

In my entire life, I have seen my father dejected only twice. First, when it came to light that Wrangler Paranjape was involved in issuing the leaflet against the managing agency and advocating handing over the factory to Karamshibhai. At the time, Wrangler Mahajani had come home to meet my father. When he asked about the company, my father said, "I am Appasaheb's student. I would not mind him slapping me if I were wrong, but I am crestfallen he has issued a leaflet against me, advocating handing over Maharashtra's industry to a capitalist."

And second, when Dr. Phatak resigned as President in the middle of this uproar. Though it was on health grounds, my father desperately needed the moral support of someone close to him. Thus, they were not on talking terms for a few days. Finally, when his health deteriorated further, uncle-in-law and nephew-in-law made up, and put an end to the stand-off. Dr. Phatak died soon after, but only after giving his blessings to his nephew-in-law.

Sathe Saheb, who joined the Brihan Maharashtra Sugar Syndicate during my father's time, and is still in service, recalls memories that are truly heart-warming. We already know that my father had a plaque behind his desk, which read, 'The needy has no common sense'. Disclosing the reason behind putting it up, Sathe Saheb says, "The company was always in need of money. Loan-repayment instalments would often be missed. Then

one day, the bank manager summoned the company secretary. Naturally, the secretary felt slighted, and said to Saheb, ‘I will not set foot in the bank’. Agashe Saheb explained, ‘We are not asking money for personal reasons. As thousands of families depend on us, we have to tolerate it’. He had a great knack of making the other person pause and reflect. The plaque was put up two days after this incident.”

There is another memory related to his faith in Lord Pandurang. Once, a businessman came asking for money. After chatting for a while, the subject of money was raised, upon which Saheb said, “I will make a call and check if it can be arranged.” After chatting some more, the businessman asked, “You were going to make a call, right?” Saheb replied that he had. The businessman said, “We never saw you make any call.” Saheb replied, “It was a wireless call.” Some more time elapsed. The businessman was still sceptical, and gathering courage, asked,

“Whom have you called to arrange for the money?” Saheb replied, “To Lord Pandurang!” In the meanwhile, the company’s chief cashier D. S. “Pant” Patwardhan came in, and upon Saheb asking him ‘Is our work done?’, replied that the bank had agreed to give the money. This is how Lord Pandurang would bring his work to fruition. It was wireless indeed!

Sathe Saheb recalls another memory. He was in-charge of disbursing salaries. One day, he went to Agashe Saheb’s cabin with his salary voucher and the money. Agashe Saheb asked him whether the employees’ salaries had been taken care of. Sathe Saheb replied, “Not yet, but it will be done in a couple of days.” Hearing this, Agashe Saheb instructed that he be paid only after the employees’ salaries had been arranged for. The staff is indeed fortunate to have such an employer!

Once, businessmen from Akluj had gathered and were talking in hushed tones, “What would happen to our money if Saheb were to suddenly die?” Sathe Saheb was standing close by. My father, though hard of hearing, could sometimes hear clearly if spoken in a low voice. He could decipher the facial expressions, lip movements and attitude of the person who, like a parasite, only takes from others. He immediately told the businessmen, “Don’t worry, I won’t die without repaying every cent. Anyway, you have already charged me a bomb, since I don’t have the cash to buy the goods. Therefore, whatever I have paid for the goods so far covers the cost of the goods and your profit. What is left is only the interest on that.” That their faces fell on hearing this was no surprise!

His affinity for Maharashtra and its industry can be seen in the fact that, even though other banks offered a lower rate of interest than Bank of Maharashtra, he continued to do business with it. Mama called this bank, established in 1935, as ‘My Bank, Sister Bank’. He was okay with this bank charging 1% more interest, as according to him, it would help the industry in Maharashtra. The bank supported the company in difficult times, and even after his death, provided as much financial assistance as possible. I

genuinely feel such people are God's apostles, and thus possess extraordinary talents.

A prime witness to my father's struggle was his driver, Joglekar, a bright man. He was a driver when behind the wheel but otherwise, was like a member of the family. He had the huge responsibility of Mama's life on his shoulders! In the beginning, my father owned used cars, which would get punctured a lot, and it fell to Joglekar to repair it, by himself. There was no cleaner or anyone else, but he did it willingly. He would be ready to travel whenever and wherever my father wished, day or night, to the factory or to Mumbai. He worked with us for at least 40 years. Aware of his intelligence, Mama used to tell him, "Why do you want to remain a driver? Study to become a mechanic." Well, he never managed that.

I remember, when the 1,000-ton factory was being built, he would drive Mama from Pune to the factory; drive back with Mama and the engineer from Škoda; drop Mama home, barely have a cup of tea, and drive the engineer to Mumbai; drop him there and drive back to be at Mama's service. I was always amazed by how hard he worked! If he were waiting for Mama, and someone asked to be dropped somewhere, he would flatly refuse. Saheb's work took precedence! He served Mama faithfully. After Mama's death, my brothers have kept amicable relations with his family, and look after their every need. Joglekar passed away a few years ago, but his wife still visits us. That my sister-in-law, Rekha, enquires about her well-being is commendable indeed!

What Joglekar was to Mama, Mahajan was to my uncle. He would always be dressed in a coat, cap, dhoti and a bush shirt. Despite having a job that involved constant travel, he was worldly wise and served my uncle excellently well. He too worked with us for about 35 years. His son is very bright, and according to Dnyaneshwar, works as Hon. Kalmadi's P. A.¹ It is evident that those who worked for us have prospered, the credit for which goes to Mama's virtuousness, honest hard work, and affinity towards the employees.

Recalling so many memories still doesn't seem enough!

Despite being so busy and facing so many difficulties, I don't remember Mama ever being irritated or angry once he entered the house. While in the house, he would laugh, joke and chat with us, and inquire after our studies. He would say, "Footwear should be left outside, when entering a temple." Everything he said was so profound! What he meant was that the house is like a holy temple, and while entering it, worldly troubles and problems should be left outside. At mealtimes, if he liked something cooked by my mother, he would recite G. L. Thokal's poem, in jest, 'My wife is such an excellent cook'.

¹ Suresh Kalmadi MP (b. 1944), Minister of State for Railways (in office 1995 – 1996)

Every day, it would be quite late by the time he ate. Busy with work at the office; people coming to meet him; checking the mail; arranging for money; he could never manage his time. Everything would be erratic and irregular. Even his bath timings were not fixed. After taking a bath, he would regularly perform puja, and worship the Gods, but that would be dependent on when he completed his work.

Three to four days a week, he would travel to the factory, or to Mumbai and Delhi. When in Pune, there would be mounds of work, but he would still find time to read, meditate and contemplate. He was fond of sports, and had played kabaddi and aatyapatya (an indigenous game) in his younger days. He could ride a horse too.

He specially built a gymnasium for Dnyaneshwar. He would bring sacks of almonds and other stuff, for him and his friends to eat, and to be used in making ‘thandai’ (an Indian cold drink). This might seem like fiction in these days of inflation, but Dnyaneshwar will vouch for it. If my memory serves me right, Dnyaneshwar had won a wrestling bout against Bhikusa Yamasa Kshatriya’s son, in 1953, when Mama was still alive.

He wished for Jagdish to have a good education too. Since our house was always full of people, and didn’t have a dedicated study room, he enrolled him in the Fergusson College hostel. Along with his studies, Pandit was learning theatre, sports and photography too. But my father’s death changed all that.

Mama gave all his children the freedom to study and develop interests of their liking, and my mother always encouraged us. Having parents like these, is like saying ‘My parents are my God, why go to Pandharpur?’.

I got married in 1953. This was the last function in my father’s life. He was soon diagnosed with diabetes. He would be fed up with the antics of his detractors, and policies of the government. He never let on to anyone, but he was gradually tiring inside. Though he was healthy and enthusiastic until the day he died, he was hugely disappointed that his own Marathi people wanted to hand over the sugar factory, which he had built, and had become Maharashtra’s pride, to a capitalist. Due to his saintly virtues, he bore this with patience. But whether you consume poison knowingly or unknowingly, it will do its job, and that is exactly what happened. Because of his ‘vata prakriti’ (a constitution governed by space and air, according to Ayurveda) his back and joints ached at times. Someone suggested that bathing in the hot springs of Vajreshwari would help, and so he started going there.

On the 9th of June, 1956, he went to Vajreshwari in the morning, as usual. As he stepped out of the springs after taking a bath, he started feeling unwell. He would always travel to Mumbai from Vajreshwari, and then come to Pune. As he was feeling particularly unwell, he told his driver,

Joglekar, they would be going to Pune instead of Mumbai. He often sought the blessings of Nityanand Swami at Vajreshwari. The Swami had taken a vow of silence and did not speak to anyone. But when my father bowed before him that day, he simply said ‘Go home’.

Mr. Sabnis was with my father then. They went to Bhiwandi, which was nearby, and consulted Dr. Pradhan. On his advice, they rested for a couple of hours at the guest house, and left for Pune. They passed the observatory by 6 pm. Joglekar drove as fast as he could, and they finally reached home. In spite of being in obvious pain and discomfort, my father folded his hands in salutation, as they passed the Omkareshwar temple. People at home had no inkling of what had transpired. He got out of the car himself, climbed the two steps, removed his coat and hung it over my grandmother’s photo. My mother was standing opposite him. He looked at her, sat down on the mattress, and in a moment, everything was over!

THE NEXT PHASE

Mama never hung his coat over my grandmother's photo. I wonder whether he did it that day to cover her eyes, so that she would not see him close his own forever! Did he think his mother, who left this world with a smile on her face; vowed never to shed tears again as she left Mangdari and doggedly raised her children in Pune; saw their capabilities, generosity, hard work and success with her own eyes; would burst into tears upon seeing her favourite son suddenly die? A pall of gloom descended over the wada and the entire region.

Starting out as an ordinary teacher, he earned so many titles along the way – a capable, first-rate industrialist; a nationalist and patriot; benevolent, minimalist, and generous; an irrepressible optimist; one who followed the adage, ‘finish what you start’, and stood strong in every situation; a man of incomparable patience; an ardent devotee of Lord Pandurang; one who considered Sant Dnyaneshwar his guru; and an arbitrator of the Alandi temple complex.

The father, whom we revered and loved, suffered a massive heart attack on the 9th of June, 1956, at 6 pm, drowned us in a sea of grief, orphaned us, and left on a journey of no return! Death suddenly swooped down and took him away, pushing my mother and us siblings into an abyss of sorrow. Pandit was studying in college then, and Dnyaneshwar was only in the eighth standard. Neither of them knew anything about their father's businesses. ‘What next?’ was the big question, but Pandit and my mother determinedly found solutions to the problems.

After my father's death, those already against him began dreaming of seizing power. They did not believe this young lad could stand up to them. On account of my father's death, a trouble-maker like Damuanna Potdar got a seat on the board of directors. The editor at the time, of publications such as Maharashtra, Maya, Madhuri and others, wrote –

“Living up to his scheming nature, Potdar managed to get a seat on the board. Mr. Agashe had borrowed ₹1.5 lakh from the carting agent, Mr. Patwardhan, and had given a promissory note for the same. After Mr. Agashe's death, his inexperienced, straightforward and innocent son,

Jagdish, was asked to write the promissory note again. Still sceptical of recovering his money, Mr. Patwardhan initiated plans of coming on the board. As he needed a partner in his endeavour, he joined hands with Potdar. They kept their scheme of getting him on the board a secret, and in fact, created an illusion of bringing the late Agashe's son on the board, even distributing a communique to that effect among the shareholders. The board sensed the impending danger and hurriedly transferred Mr. Agashe's shares in his son's name. Once on the board, my father's reputation stood the son in good stead. Later however, Mr. Potdar conspired to deem Jagdish's candidature invalid; Mr. Patwardhan played his part to perfection, and through a proxy, got himself elected."

In his magazine, Maharashtra, Mr. Ambike published photos of D. V. Potdar and A. R. Bhat, naming them Kali and Kalusha (two evil people from Hindu mythology). This was in May 1957. Like these two, many others tried to wrest power by grabbing the spot vacated by my father. But Pandit, being calm and patient by nature, was not perturbed. Showing respect to, and placing his faith in, Mr. Sabnis, who was now like a father to him, he found a way out of this situation. The battle was won, but governance was a different ball-game altogether.

The company's situation began to improve from 1956. Instances of depositors asking their money back had started coming down. As my father had followed the practice of placing complete trust in the entire workforce and allotting responsibilities, everyone at the factory and the Pune office knew their jobs. He had not kept power in his own hands, but decentralised it, implementing today's modern methods about 40 years ago. Keshavrao Chaphekar, the general manager, ably looked after the technical side. The board of directors got the requisite guidance from the late Shankarrao Limaye. It was imperative to receive financial assistance from the bank; this was taken care of by Pant Patwardhan and Mr. Walimbe. The important thing was, that due to the immense faith the workforce had in my father, they stood as one behind the administration. The depositors and shareholders cooperated too.

Though all this was fine, on some days, Pandit would go to the office with only ₹500 in his pocket. He came on the board in 1957-58, became the managing director on July 1, 1970, and began working alongside Dnyaneshwar, who had come on the board in 1966-67. My father's name and achievements were great, while Pandit was young and inexperienced. Thus, people looked at him differently, and were sceptical about his ability to manage such a vast business. But he emerged from this situation, like a thread through the eye of a needle, and put the company on the road to prosperity.

He too was fond of agriculture, and had therefore turned his entire attention to its development in the Shreepur region. He had given extremely generous loans (even interest-free at times) to the needy farmers, to

facilitate buying of land, digging wells, laying pipelines, and establishing lift-schemes. Farmers, at one point of time on the brink of starvation, now owned houses and cars, and came to be recognised as wealthy horticulturists. This was the only company which gave loans worth ₹1.9 crore, despite bearing great financial strain, and brought about a green revolution in the arid Shreepur region of Malshiras. The credit for this goes to Pandit. The tremendous love and respect the farmers have for Pandit is apparent even today.

A huge responsibility had fallen on Pandit's young shoulders due to the untimely death of my father. He had barely recovered from it, when another calamity struck, the Panshet floods! Though severely affected by this, he somehow managed to salvage important documents. He had just about left the house with the documents, when it was destroyed by a wall of gushing water. It was more than he could bear. He suffered a severe shock, and remained unwell for almost three years after this event. Recovering from it, he got back to his original self and took over the reins of the company, which was a blessing for us.

During that period, Sabinis Saheb stood solidly behind him, while R. H. Kelkar too helped in every way. He looked after Pandit like an elder brother, and helped him and Dnyaneshwar a great deal in the affairs of the company. His wife, the late Lalitatai, also helped during Pandit's illness. She would comfort and help our late sister, Tai, who lived with them, and would arrange for us to stay at their house.

The company was running well now, with Pandit taking an interest in all matters. People were now convinced of his capabilities. He was gradually getting Dnyaneshwar's assistance too. The Bombay Tenancy and Agricultural Act, which was already in place, was now made applicable to the sugar factories too. This affected the land-holding of the company, which had to give up a lot of its land. Pandit was besieged with multiple problems, from issues of income tax and sales tax, to repayment of some old loans. It was as if his hand was caught under a rock. But because of beacons such as Sabinis and Kelkar Saheb, he could survive through it all.

It reminds me of a Rabindranath Tagore story –

Some innocent and naïve people lived in a town. They were happy to see the sun rise in the morning. After finishing the day's work, they were sitting in the courtyard of their house. As the sun began to set, they got scared. Since it was getting dark, they panicked at the thought of what would happen to them once the sun set, and began to cry. The sun, of course, set as usual, and darkness took over. Their state was pitiable, as they believed everything was over for them. Just then, they heard a little voice. They looked in its direction, straining their ears. They could see a very small light in the distance. Burning as bright as it could, the light said, "Do not worry. Even though the sun has set, I am here. I will provide you with light." The people were very happy.

Similarly, though my father was no more, the light of my young brothers' capabilities continued to illuminate the company's future.

But how cruel fate can be! It could not bear to see us happy and took our mother away, on February 1, 1983. Since that day, love, affection and intimacy remained mere words in the vocabulary; those emotions died with our mother!

As if this grief was not enough, Pandit suffered a heart attack in 1984. He however recovered fully through the efforts of renowned doctors, Dr. Sardesai and Dr. Khare. For the next three years, he remained extremely enthusiastic and happy, like never before. With work at the factory and the office, and meeting and talking to everyone at home with candour and gaiety, he had settled into a nice routine. We had no inkling of the impending danger.

On November 16, 1986, he went to Shreepur as usual. As he began feeling unwell, he came back to Pune. His driver, Sadhu, looked after him with great care. He came home and went to sleep. Still feeling unwell, he came down to the hall, at around 5 in the evening, and slept on the sofa below the portrait of our parents, never to wake up again! Fate had dealt a cruel hand. Oh God! You are called 'The Merciful', aren't you? Then why did you become so ruthless and take away the lion's cub, out of turn?

November 16, 1986 turned out to be a black day. Pandit died of heart failure. A grand and noble persona merged into the elements. It was impossible for Dnyaneshwar to control his grief, but Tai, our elder sister, was there to console him. She, in fact, comforted every one of us, in spite of being unwell herself. She tended to Pandit day and night, and was the only one with him in his final moments. Pandit was younger to us three sisters. The pillar of wealth had collapsed due to his untimely death.

We were yet to come to terms with his death, that our beloved sister, Tai, succumbed to diabetes, a mere month and a half later. We didn't know what to do! Why was fate dealing blow after blow? All that can be said is that you cannot escape your destiny!



THE AGASHE FAMILY

Standing [from left]: Mrs. Sarla Bhide, Mrs. Vimal Khare, Mrs. Leela Mehendale, Mrs. Sushila Sahasrabudhe, Mrs. Shakuntala Karandikar, Mrs. Shyamala Karve

Sitting [from left]: Shri Panditrao Agashe, Shri Dnyaneshwar Agashe, Shrimati Indirabai Agashe, Mrs. Rekha Agashe, Mrs. Neela Khare



MY BROTHER DNYANESHWAR AND HIS WIFE REKHA

Standing [from left]: Mandar, Sheetal and Ashutosh

ON THE SPINNING WHEEL

Amidst all this, Dnyaneshwar has put his personal grief aside, very capably taken on the mantle of all the companies of the Agashe family, and is carrying forward my father's legacy. He has a lion's heart, which reminds me of my father calling him 'his lion'.

The factory, which was running so well, faced problems anew because of the policies of the government with the State Farming Department adopting an obstructionist stance. There was a financial crunch again, and the company did not have the capital to venture into another field. It was manufacturing Industrial Spirit, which was used as raw material in the liquor business. Thousands of families were directly or indirectly dependent on the company, and thus, the Agashe family, though not mentally prepared, had to enter the liquor business out of sheer helplessness.

Once the Government of Maharashtra permitted the manufacturing of country liquor, Brihan Maharashtra's product came on the market for the first time, so suddenly and with such speed, that it gave the more established companies the shock of their lives! Life gives each one of us an opportunity, sometime or the other, but not everyone is able to keep an eye out, and grab it. Through his efforts, Dnyaneshwar has managed to achieve it. Since the product was of a very high quality, the merchants were willing to buy it even at a lower rate of profit. However, Dnyaneshwar maintained that the merchants should get due profit. This progressive outlook of his can be seen in many such instances.

Rum manufactured by the company had great demand abroad and was being exported too. As Prime Minister Morarji Desai advocated prohibition, the company began manufacturing it in Canada. Despite the heavy demand, lakhs of rupees had to be spent on advertising, just to stay in the race. It became impossible to raise finances living in India and hence, the company had to wind up its operations. Though there were financial losses, Dnyaneshwar's business acumen, and his knack of building personal relations with people across the board, ensured that Brihan Maharashtra did not suffer a financial crisis. Everyone is with you in victory, but the true test of a commander, is to be able to make a successful retreat at the opportune

moment. This quality is clearly evident in Dnyaneshwar.

Anyone would be fed up with the financial difficulties, and the policies of the government, but belying his young age, Dnyaneshwar keeps a cool head, and never loses his temper in the face of unexpected difficulties and the occasional insults. I often wonder how he manages to do it!

He loves the game of cricket. He played as a wicket-keeper and frontline batsman in Maharashtra's Ranji Trophy team. Known to be an aggressive batsman, he honed his wicket-keeping skills under the watchful eyes of the late Nana Joshi. Maharashtra almost never won the Ranji Trophy. He says, "Since we were accustomed to losing, the sport taught me to accept both, victory and defeat, without letting it affect you." He thus calmly faces the problems of the company, and the insults.

He behaves with great affinity with everyone who visits his office, and with his staff. Be it his primary school teacher, or a well-known personality, he invites them to his cabin, opening the door himself. He welcomes every visitor, whether known to him or not, with a smile. Though this may seem trivial, it is not possible without the right values having been instilled. He often goes abroad for work, but returns home as soon as the work is done. He doesn't believe in the 'daddy-mummy' culture. His children call him Baba, and their mother, Aai.¹ His elder son, Mandar, is following in his footsteps, and I believe will alleviate the loneliness he has felt ever since Pandit's death.

I pray to the Almighty for our parents' virtuousness and blessings to always be with us!

¹ *Baba* and *Aai*, being the respective terms for one's father and mother, in Marathi

CONCLUSION

Once I sat down to write my father's life story, memories and events associated with every word would dance before my eyes, drawing my mind into the past. Silken threads of those memories would unfold, and spill onto the paper in the form of words. My father's life is like a brocaded shawl on Lord Pandurang's shoulder, and as pure as the Ganges. If the detractors' feet, stained with selfishness, are dipped in the flowing water of the Ganges, far from the water becoming impure, the flow of saintliness would transform their feet, that is, their attitude.

I am also heading into the evening of my life, and am just happy to have got an opportunity of expressing the respect I have for my father. It would have been far better, were this to be written 10-12 years ago. A number of people, who came to be associated with him, are no more, which is beyond anyone's control. That this is being written now is no less important.

I could write about my father's life and work at the factory and the office, and about all the other events, due to the memories and information stored and compiled by Narubhai Limaye, Mukundmama Gokhale and Vinayakrao Sathe, among others, and their support and cooperation, for which I will forever remain in their debt.

As I string this necklace of the pearls of my memories, the fact that the most precious stones, my father, mother, brother and elder sister, have fallen out, gives me great sorrow.

My father's life is like a bouquet of the fragrant 'bakul' flowers. Though they may seem to have withered after all these years, their fragrance remains as fresh as ever. A poet eulogises my father so –

*“Even more generous than Karna, truer to your word
than a mother, You are sugar, you are nectar, you are devotion,
you are faith,
A great bridge of your renown is built.”*

I offer innumerable salutations to my deities – my god-like, revered father, and my mother, the embodiment of love and affection!

*“May we remain blessed, I pray to you Oh! Saints,
At every step, in life, I will remain in your debt.”*

As we sat chatting one day, my sisters proposed I write my father's life story. I was surprised by the fact that this responsibility was being entrusted to me, since they were all well-educated, and far brighter than me. I thought they were pulling a fast one as always. But then I decided to give it a try, and got down to writing. I am finishing it today, on the occasion of Datta Jayanti (a Hindu festival). Dear sisters, I have attempted to write it, acceding to your request. I will end by paying homage to our father. Such is the state of my mind, on account of the memories of our childhood and our parents –

*“As the time comes to bid goodbye, emotions flood the mind,
The braid of memory unfolds on the screen of life,
On the wings of angels, the years went by,
All the pouting and sulking is but a memory now,
Though the association was short, the ties are silken,
While departing so, the mind always sighs,
Though the association was short, the imprints are deep,
Our mischievous childhood spent on golden wings,
Don't get angry, oh sisters, your friend is unhappy within,
As the time comes to bid goodbye, tears well up in the eyes,
Let us forget the past, and just say goodbye.”*



MEMORIAL BUST OF MY FATHER
CHANDRASHEKHAR GOVIND AGASHE
BY P. V. KELKAR, SHREEPUR

*Those who may read may read, those who do not like
it may not,*

*But the Lord would be satisfied by this accurate
narration,*

*Those who follow other critics may not appreciate this
critique,*

*But the devout, and those without envy or pride, will
respect this critique.*

– Vaman Pandit

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Shakuntala Bhupendra Karandikar
(1931 – 2018)

Shakuntala Karandikar (née Agashe) was the second-eldest daughter of Chandrashekhar and Indirabai Agashe, born on July 20, 1931. After completing her diploma in art, she married Bhupendra Karandikar in 1953.

A lover of art, literature, cuisine, and music, she was keenly involved in social work and philanthropy. She was the founding president of the Rotary Inner Wheel Club and Wednesday Sisters Circle society in Dahanu, Maharashtra. She was instrumental in raising funds and support for several social and educational institutions in and around Dahanu.

She penned her father's biography titled *Viśvasta* in Marathi on July 10, 1992. She died on June 1, 2018, aged 86, and is survived by her daughter, son, daughter-in-law and three grandchildren.

This English translation is the second edition of this biography; published on the occasion of the 134th birth anniversary of Chandrashekhar Agashe; published in commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the first edition's publication.

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*An ordinary teacher becomes a renowned lawyer,
and through the legal profession, a successful industrialist.*

*Donning the role of a trustee,
destiny names him*

Chandrashekhar Govind Agashe.