



1. Introduction

Dear Volunteers of Nikam Guruji Yoga Kutir, it is my greatest pleasure to bring to you the biography of our beloved Master, Nikam Guruji, through this biweekly email. On one hand it brings me a great relief that I now have the opportunity to fulfill a dream which I had cherished for a long time now. But on the other hand it also brings me some anxiety as I am not sure how well I can shoulder this responsibility. While the inspiration to take up this task of my Guru's biography lies in my fifteen year's of close association with him from 1980 to 1995, the basis for this string of emails is mainly upon an existing biography of Guruji in the 'Marathi' language. A short history of how this Biography in the Marathi language came about is presented below for your understanding.

After years of perseverance and follow up with Guruji, the Management of Shri Ambika Yoga Kutir finally got a green-light from Guruji in Year 1992 to proceed with his Biography. A well know biographer, Mr. Shashikant Chavān was invited to take up this task.. Mr. Chavān already had a popular Biography on Martyr Kotwal to his credit and was then the President of an Art Society of the Bombay Municipal Corporation. What's more, he had, on several occasions, expressed a keen interest in writing Guruji's Biography with the Management Committee. The project of Guruji's Biography was kicked off on 1st April 1992. While still attending his daily classes at Kutir, Guruji would sit down for interviews with Mr. Chavān and his assistant two to three times a week. Now 75, Guruji had amazed the interviewers with his memories on the details of the events that had happened some 50 years ago.

Along the interviews, the interviewers felt a need to actually visit the places Guruji was mentioning and to interview the individuals involved in the incidents narrated by Guruji. A study-group was accordingly set up and the group visited the villages and towns of Dhule,

Mhasve, Raver, Chopda, Amalner, Vavde etc together with Guruji. Guruji had decided to couple a Yoga camp together with this trip. As a Yoga demonstrator for this Yoga camp, I got a chance to travel with this team.

The news about Guruji's arrival had already spread among the villages. Although he was visiting the villages almost after thirty over years, the excitement among the villagers was evident. Almost all the villagers – elderly men and women, youngsters and children were present with full strength at the Village entrances along the express ways. They were ready with Garlands and sweets. Stages were set up to have short welcome ceremonies with the village heads as guests of honour. Wrestlers, Gymnasts and Sportsmen from the Gymnasiums established by Guruji had prepared drills and demonstrations. The long lasting love and respect he had acquired from those villagers was clearly visible. Writes Mr. Chavān in the biography : “ The roots of Guruji's activities in those villages had penetrated deep into the society. The villagers explained the details of Guruji's work as if it had happened only yesterday. The details received from the villagers was overwhelming and it gave us a deeper understanding into his efforts to improve that society. I realized that Guruji was much greater than I had thought about him.”

Like every other Publication, I received a free copy of the Biography from Guruji. A note on the first page read in Guruji's own handwriting – “Om. Ideal Yoga Instructor, respected Atul bhai Deshpande, May Goddess Bhagawati bless you with long life and good health for the propagation of Yoga.” I have serious doubts about the praise he showered upon me, but that was my Guru's way of encouraging his disciples. A scanned copy of this note is attached to give the readers a glimpse of Guruji's hand-writing.

2. Guruji's birthplace – the 'Mhasve' Village

Along the express way connecting the 'Jalgao' and 'Parole' districts of the Maharashtra state of India, lies a village called 'Mhasve'. It's a typical village like any other in the region.- A temple of Goddess 'Janjani' at the entrance, a lake nearby the temple, greenery etc. It was a practice among the villagers to wash, pray to the Goddess and only then enter the village. The lake next to the temple had springs that provided it with water throughout the year. All over the village, are scattered remnants of some beautiful sculptures in pieces indicating it could have been a place of some historic importance and destroyed in invasions that were rampant during the 15th century in this part of India. Two stone towers, about three storey high in the surrounding of the temple had drawn curious crowds from the surrounding region and sometimes, foreigners to the Mhasve. The two adjacent stone towers would easily swing when pushed by two or three men. Interestingly, when one is swung, the other would swing too. The structure is a few centuries old, but the mechanism still works.

Although a few banana plantations could be found in Mhasve, the main source of income here was through the farming of cotton, groundnut and a crops called 'jowar' and 'bajri'. The practice was to harvest only one crop per year due to limited rainfall and that meant a very limited cash-flow in the community.

The village could be monetarily poor, but certainly not culturally. Various celebrations throughout the year provided ample opportunity to nurture music, drama, painting, poetry etc. The village temple with it's large open space and a hall was the centre for all Cultural activities. The village hosted a yearly fair where the folks from several nearby villages came together for the trade of cattle, crops, cloth etc. Similarly the celebration of 'Moharram' hosted by the Muslim population, but participated by every religion was very popular. The villagers also celebrated the yearly festivals of 'Ganesh Jayanti' and 'Navaratri' with great enthusiasm and energy.

'Mhasve' was home for a small population of four to five hundred people, yet comprising of various religions and 'Castes'. The militant village heads called 'Patils' controlled the overall society, most of the times with their own whims, fancies and conveniences. They decided the laws, policies and punishments in the village with their muscle power and the rest of 'lower castes' must follow their rule. Oppression of these lower castes – mostly plantation labours, cleaners, barbers, tailors etc was rampant. Opportunities of jobs, education, trade etc were closed for those belonging to the 'lower castes'. The lower castes were forced to follow a system called 'Balutedari' in which they must work throughout the year without any cash reward. The rewards would be decided by the higher castes they served and would come in kinds such as grains, oil, clothes etc. This social structure and the oppression of the lower castes

is described here, not out of any offence to any community but for the readers to better understand and appreciate the struggle Guruji had to go through to rise up in life. His life is a story of a rare individual who dared to dream in spite of dire adversities and hopeless conditions, plan and execute his mission and at the same time share his success generously with the rest of the society.

3. The Nikam Family

In this village of 'Mhasve' lived the Nikam family...possibly with a few generations of their roots in the village. Guruji's father, Ramachandra, worked as a barber there, earning his meager income through the door to door services that he provided to the villagers. He had supplemented his income through his years of hobby of playing an ancient and popular musical instrument called 'Bheri'. Well known for this 'Bheri' skills in the surrounding villages and the Jalgaon district, he was frequently invited to play the 'Bheri' at weddings and other celebrations. With these two sources of income, he was able to provide for his happy family of two daughters, one son, wife and the ever-present one or two kids of poorer relatives whom he and his wife brought to their home for spans of years since their own parents were unable to support them. (Such a support network among the relatives was common among Indians in the past but is now dwindling in the urban lifestyle.).

Mr. Ramachandra (Guruji's father) had a close association with the 'Nath' tradition of Yoga called the 'Nath-Sampradaya'. There were Nine masters ('Nav-Nath') of this 'Nath' tradition which originated a few thousand years ago. They developed various Hathayoga techniques and discovered amazing herbal remedies. Several Chants were inspired to them in deep meditations. The followers of this 'Nath' tradition have done immense grassroots work in spreading the Spiritual knowledge of Yoga, Tantra, Mantra and Herbal Medication. Wearing a jade-like stone ring in the ear was the sign of being a follower of this 'Nath' tradition and Guruji's father wore such a ring in his ear. Wandering adepts ('Sadhus') of this 'Nath' tradition would frequently stay with the Nikam family when they visited that part of India. They would then visit surrounding villages providing their services like herbal medication for various ailments, snake bites, scorpion stings etc, relieving those suffering from evil spirits, evil spells, black magic etc., teaching Yoga techniques, leading religious rituals with their knowledge of chants, etc. The peculiarity of these 'Nath' Sadhus was that they never asked for a single penny for the services they provided. Due to this, they were highly regarded in the society. It is strange that a world so particular of Copyrights and IP rights keeps mum about crediting the 'Nav-Naths' for their discoveries in Hathayoga and Mantras. (The roots of Guruji's fondness for Yoga, herbs and Mantras could be traced to his father's close association with the 'Nath' tradition of Yoga. In his teenage years, Guruji learned several herbal medicines, chants and understood the 'Nath' practices from the adepts as and when they stayed at his village home.)

Guruji's mother, Panka-bai was a well known mid-wife in and around the 'Mhasve' village. As no gynecologists were available in that rural region, her expertise in child-birth and pre and post natal care had been used by villagers for years. Due to his father's busy schedule, most of Guruji's childhood was spent in very close association with his mother. Guruji was much more closer to her than his father and much of his thinking was influenced by her. In early childhood,

Guruji used to listen to her singing of 'Ovi' songs. Most village women sang these 'Ovi' songs while manually grinding the wheat in the early morning hours before sun-rise. The lyrics of these 'Ovis' are mostly about wisdom, philosophy and science but are so worded that even the most illiterate person can still understand them. Written by the realized saints for the laymen, the 'Ovis' had shaped much of the culture and psyche of the 'Maharashtra' state of India. Guruji remembers waking up in early morning hours, walking up to his mother and lying down with his head on her lap, listening to the 'Ovis' sung by his mother and sisters in half wakeful state. His respect and attachment to his mother was evident from the [attached](#) picture where he posed touching her feet. I have always seen this photograph framed and displayed in his living room.

Not much information is available about Guruji's two sisters who were elder to him and were named 'Dhaga-bai' and 'Chandra-bai'.

4. Birth, Childhood and Marriage

Barber Ramachandra Nikam and his wife Pankabai were going through an anxious August in the year 1917. Panka-bai was pregnant and skilled village mid-wife had predicted that the delivery would be any time now. Mr. Ramchandra and Mrs. Pankabai had wanted a son and their wish was about to be granted. Finally, on 15th August, a baby boy was delivered bringing great joy to the parents. The boy was named 'Pundalik' (after a legendary devoted son who had asked God Himself to wait outside his room since he was busy serving his parents). Little did Ramchandra and Panka-bai knew that their son would rise from the ashes of the communal oppression and extreme poverty like a Phoenix and emerge as a leading Yoga Master to guide thousands of aspirants across India. The boy would, in future, be an exemplary leader inspiring thousands to propagate yoga selflessly across the world and would come to fame as 'Nikam Guruji'.

Guruji grew up together with three sisters – Dhagabai, Chandrabai and Sundrabai. Aside from that there always used to be one or two kids of some poorer relatives taking shelter with this poor but kind family. The family had a piece of land, but mostly barren. On top of that, the absence of rainfall hardly helped to provide any support to the family. The main support to the family came from Mr. Ramchandra's Barber's profession – mostly carried out under a tree, beside the road or in the open spaces in front of the customer's home. Being the 'Balutedars' of the village, returns were not guaranteed in spite of the services fully provided. If there were returns, they were in kind and not in cash.

While growing in the village, Guruji had developed varied interests. Reciting aloud the poetry taught at school together with his school friends while roaming through the village was one of them. He also developed a deep understanding and liking for reading. The lessons in the class would often start with Pundalik's loud reading of the passages and then followed by the teacher's explanation. This aloud singing and reading helped him to develop his pronunciation as well as voice control which was to come in very handy for his activities in future. Attending the daily evening prayers called 'Arti' in the village temple was Pundalik's favorite routine. On rare occasion, if he was late to reach the temple, the temple priest would wait for a few more minutes until he arrived for the Arti.

Child marriages were widely in practice in India prior to the 'Child Marriage Restraint Act' which took effect in 1929. Like the Middle East, Africa, Indonesia, South America and some parts of Europe (European Judaism), this practice suited various socio-economic causes in India too. According to the social norms of those days, Guruji was married at the age of nine! This was the same year as he was enrolled in the school. Most of the school-going kids were married then. Guruji's wife was only eight then. Guruji remembered his father playing with them with him sitting on one lap of his father and her sitting on his father's other lap. It was not required that

the bride must start staying with the groom immediately after the wedding. Guruji's wife started staying with Guruji only after two more years when she was ten. She was very fair, smart and well mannered. Within no time she acquired the love and affection of all the family members and enjoyed a very loving relationship with her Father in law and Mother in law.

5. Social Awareness

Popular social movements attract the interest of not only adults, but kids too. A great saint and activist called 'Gadge Baba', had in those days, moved the masses against the barbaric practice of animal sacrifice prevalent in Hindu rituals. Gadge Baba was illiterate, yet a powerful speaker, a highly skilled mass leader and a good poet. After renouncing every worldly belonging he had, he had dedicated himself for this cause and was a great role model for his followers. Like the rest of the western Indian state of 'Maharashtra', the Mhasve village too, had not escaped the influence of his discourses. The thoughts and teachings of this 'Gadge Baba' had influenced Guruji greatly in his childhood. Guruji remembers walking across the stretch of the village while singing Gadge Baba's songs in high pitch together with his friends.

Similarly, those days being the days of freedom struggle in India, some freedom fighters had occasionally visited the village of 'Mhasve'. This was possibly because Mhasve falls right along the highway joining the two cities of 'Jalgaon' and 'Raver' and was easily accessible. The motivating speeches, the courage and the sacrifices of the freedom fighters too had influenced the adults and kids alike in Mhasve. Though the adults were under the close watch of the police for any political activities, the kids were generally not suspected. Guruji and his friends were, on several occasions used to distribute the propaganda from the freedom fighters to the Mhasve and nearby villages.

Although Guruji's ideology was primarily molded by his mother's teachings and his reading, the exposure to the teachings of Gadge Baba and several Independence activists had also influenced Guruji in his childhood. The respect commanded by such leaders had impressed him and he had already realized that true fulfillment comes not merely by meeting one's own ends but by contributing to the society and the welfare of the downtrodden.

While life moved on, enjoying the small pleasures of the rural childhood years, Guruji's life was suddenly rocked by an event which brought him to the cruel reality of the social discrimination rampant in those days.

An unwritten rule that banned any lower caste family from all kinds of pomp or celebration was broken by a village tailor. While the militant village heads expected the lower caste to wear rags and keep any celebrations extremely low profile, this tailor had paraded a full fledged procession of his son's wedding across the village, complete with decorations, music band and flashy new clothes. This had greatly angered the Upper caste villagers and the tailor's family was 'out-casted'. In addition to the humiliation to be suffered by the 'out-casted' family, it also meant that none of the villagers should provide any kind of help to the out-casted family. After a few months of this isolation, the helpless tailor had turned to Guruji's father, Mr. Ramachandra Nikam for some help. An aloof person, hardly getting involved in other's matters, Mr.

Ramacahandra Nikam was still a kind person. He had secretly helped the tailor. Somehow, the news leaked and attracted the wrath of the village heads (Patils) on the Nikam family. The Patils went all out against the Nikam family to bring them to their knees. Gangsters were sent to the Nikam's house to verbally abuse them, throw stones on their tiled roofs and to throw burning kerosene bottles in the Nikam's fields. Land belonging to generations of Mr. Ramchandra Nikam was claimed by the Patils and court cases were filed against him. Several times, hungry cattle was driven into Mr. Nikam's fields where they destroyed the grown crop. Villagers were warned not to co-operate in any manner with the Nikams.

6. Struggle for Education

I had once read – ‘It is not the size of the dog in the fight that matters. It is the size of the fight in the dog that matters.’

In those days, it was not expected that every child must be schooling. Besides, who would serve the village if a lower caste balutedar’s child attended school? Yet, Guruji’s mother, Pankabai was determined to enroll him in the school. Her wisdom told her that it was the only way her son could survive and possibly progress in his life. The village school provided classes from Primary-One up to Primary-three and Guruji was enrolled at the school’s prescribed age of nine. By enrolling her son of low-caste origin to school, Pankabia attracted the ridicule and sarcasm from the villagers. The School teacher, Mr. Shankar Naik took charge of the boy (of course, Guruji was then addressed by his name – Pundalik)

As three years passed, Guruji passed his ‘Standard Three’ academic year in the village school. The village school did not provide any further education and that meant that he must attend another school in the nearby small township called ‘Parole’. That school was about two miles away with no transport available, but there were other village boys who would also attend that school. Guruji’s mother managed to persuade his father for enrolling him in this district school and this way his education continued.

The next few years, however were full of roadblocks in his education. If not for the motivation and guidance from his mother, he would not be able to continue and complete his further studies. (In later years, Guruji mentioned on few occasions that if not for her, he would be “shaving people’s heads under some tree” for life in the ‘Mhasve’ village.) The experience of schooling in this new school was far from pleasant for Guruji and the other village boys. The boys had to spend much of their time running the two miles to and from the school. This left them with hardly any time for doing their homework and angered their class teacher. This abusive and cruel teacher, Mr.Bhatia, took away all the motivation to learn from the boys. Under his ‘care’, the boys went through sever physical abuse. That included punching, kicking, rolling them on the floor and sitting on top of them. Verbal abuse too was sever with uncalled for references to their families, castes etc. He was very particular to separate the ‘Lower’ caste kids from the ‘Higher’ caste kids in the class. The boys, already tired with the two mile run to the school in the scorching sun, continued to endure this abuse each day.

After several months, the boys gave up and found an innovative way to escape the abuse. They would leave home for the school, spent their school hours in the nearby ruins of an old fort and then return back home after the school hours. Needless to say, Guruji’s grades and the further inquiry by his mother revealed what was happening. After understanding the situation, she asked Guruji to somehow complete the academic year with the best possible grades he could

achieve. Accordingly Guruji just managed to complete 'Standard Four' year in this school at Parole.

7. Struggle for Education (Contd.)

Once Guruji finished his 'Standard-Four' year, his mother convinced her husband to send Guruji to another school in the nearby 'Jalgaon' city. Here, he was to stay with one of his elder cousins, Mr. Bhisn Sonavne. In the past, this cousin was supported for years of stay and education by Guruji's father and had now settled down with a good job and family in Jalgaon. Due to the respect that he had for Guruji's father, the simple and mild mannered Bhisn was more than willing to host Guruji at his home. Accordingly Guruji started staying with Bhisn in Jalgaon city, coming back to visit his parents only on weekends and holidays. As Guruji struggled to adapt to the city life, things went smooth for a month's time, only to worsen after that. Known among her neighbors to be aggressive and quarrelsome, the cousin's wife was anything but happy to shelter Guruji in her home. Totally ignoring the favors her husband had received in the past from Guruji's father, she took every possible effort to drive Guruji out of her home. Each day, Guruji kept on suffering (and forgiving) her verbal abuses and humiliations. By now he was mature enough to know that the only way out of the poverty and the discrimination in the village was to educate himself until 'Vernacular Finals'. This was the minimum qualification in those days to acquire a decent job in the nearby Jalgaon city. It was roughly equivalent to the Secondary-two of the current system and he had a strong resolve to complete it successfully. The verbal abuses from Bhisn's wife were increasing by the day. Now, she would make sure that Guruji got only the left-over food from the earlier day for meals. Finally, after a year, she managed to drive him out of her house by accusing him of stealing her husband's wallet! (When the wallet was found after a few days, the cousin begged Guruji to return back, but it was too late.)

Fortunately, in spite of the troubles at home, Guruji had managed to pass the 'Standard-five' year in the Jalgaon school. But what next? There were only two more years left to accomplish the Vernacular Finals. But that required staying and surviving in the Jalgaon city. That was impossible with the meager earnings his father earned. Guruji's father was clear of the next step. He should simply stop the education and work as a barber with him! But once again, Guruji's mother stayed firm and insisted on finding another way out to continue Guruji's education. Suddenly Guruji's father remembered about a long time friend, Mr. Ghotu Budho, who was a 'Circle Inspector' in the Jalgaon Police force. Those were the days when friends freely asked for and reciprocated with favours to each other. People accommodated 'others', not only in their social networks, but also within their homes for years. Mr. Ghotu was asked for providing shelter to Guruji and he agreed happily. Guruji enrolled himself in the 'Central School' of Jalgaon and his struggle for education seemed to end.

Mr.Ghotu and his wife were a kind couple and treated Guruji like their own son. Guruji too reciprocated by helping Mr.Ghotu in whatever way he could. Due to his fondness for hands-on

work, he took keen interest in the construction of a house that Ghotu was building and labored long hours on the construction site. He also took care of a horse and a buffalo owned by Ghotu developing a bond with the animals within weeks.

Two years passed on smoothly and Guruji cleared his 'Vernacular Finals'. This was a significant achievement as no one in his past generations or current relatives had progressed so much in academics. Besides, in those days, this achievement was equivalent to what is now in acquiring a degree. A decent job was now possible and that meant that he would be able to pull himself and his family out of the poverty and the dire social discrimination back home.

8. First Job and return to Mhasve.

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, a friend of Guruji's father by the name 'Ghotu' had provided shelter to Guruji for education. Under Ghotu's care, Guruji had now completed the 'Venacular Finals' which, in those days, was sufficient to land into a decent job. As Guruji was pondering upon how to move forward in his career, a job opportunity walked in. A neighbor of Mr. Ghotu called 'Totaram Patil' had been observing Guruji for the past two years. He was impressed by Guruji's attitude and his hard-working nature. This 'Totaram Patil' was a descendent of a royal family and had inherited abundant wealth, properties, shops etc. He was on a lookout for a reliable clerk who can maintain proper accounts of his shops and found Guruji to be a suitable candidate. He talked to Guruji and offered him a job. The offered salary was only enough for Guruji's survival, but Guruji thought over and concluded that it was not a bad start. He hoped to gain some experience through this job and then move on for a better paying job whereby his family back in the village can be financially supported. Accordingly Guruji joined Mr. Totaram's workforce and took over the charge of keeping accounts of one of his grocery shops. Within few months, he gained his boss's confidence. But as Guruji took more and more responsibilities, the sad side of Mr. Totaram's business emerged. Although the business was running fairly well, it was mired by the in-fighting and power struggle among the relatives. Within no time, Guruji found himself caught between the family disputes, sometimes being used as a pawn to forward either party's selfish motives. As months passed, their in-fighting worsened, making Guruji's life difficult by the day. It was very much possible that he may one day get trapped into one of their ongoing court cases. Hardly about an year after taking the job, Guruji was already thinking of quitting it. But he was finding it very difficult to talk to his boss. After all, he had shown so much of trust and affection over the year, that Guruji was feeling obliged to continue.

As Guruji was going through this dilemma, suddenly a resident of Mhasve (Guruji's village) happened to meet him. The villager told him that Mr. Ramachandra (Guruji's father) was ill and he better visit him immediately. Guruji didn't realize the seriousness immediately, but thought that this was a good excuse to relinquish his duties and get out of the in-fighting among his boss's relatives. Accordingly, he talked about his father's sickness and requested to be relieved from his duties. Kind Totaram obliged and Guruji returned back to his village of Mhasve.

His father's health had indeed deteriorated. Worst, he had lost any interest in living after years of resistance to the village head's atrocities. Almost bed-ridden, he was now incapable of earning for his family. In spite of this situation, Guruji's mother had stayed as strong as ever. She had continued the farming together with her daughter. To work in the farm, she also called back Guruji's wife who was at that time staying with her parents. Greatly pampered by the parents back home, Guruji's wife was now toiling in the field together with her Mother in law.

With no job on hand, Guruji had to now support his family. He remembered his father's words of wisdom ..."educate yourself as much as you can, but don't forget your forefather's skill-set of barbers. It will always support you in times of difficulty..." By the time he was thinking about this, a villager or two had already inquired whether he would like to shave them. Without a second thought, Guruji started off his services as a barber to the village. It was traditional for Indian barbers to supplement their services with the service of massage. With the knowledge acquired from his father and his physical strength, Guruji did excellent massage. In the later part of his life, he treated several patients with this art. Together with the farming, over the months, he was able to support his family financially.

In this profession as a barber, at times, Guruji had to provide a service which he hated the most. A cruel tradition called 'Vidhwa-Vapan', particularly in higher caste families, required all widows to shave their heads. Long hair was a prime sign of beauty and a widow had no right to look beautiful. Shaving a widow's head was the most disgusting task that Guruji had to execute.

9. Early Physical training

Like most of the young boys, Guruji had a passion for sports and physical training. Partly due to his drive to excel and partly due to his natural agility and strength, he had mostly remained ahead of the rest of the boys in Physical training. Once a while, a wandering monk by the name of 'Masurekar Maharaj' visited the Mhasve village. This monk had taken the Maharashtra state by storm due to his passion for the revival and propagation of Surya-Namaskars. He never stayed for more than three days in a given place. The youngsters he trained must catch up with the skills within those three days, for it was never known when they would see him again. Young Guruji had taken the 'Diksha' (initiation) of Surya-Namaskars from this monk. Surya-Namaskar was more of a social movement rather than a mere physical exercise in the Maharashtra state those days. Strong young men competed against each other for number of Sun Salutes, Villages held SuryaNamaskar events for collective targets like hundred thousand Sun Salutes and Gymnasiums gave away trophies for the number of SuryaNamaskars performed.

Like the Suryanamaskars, wrestling was another sensation that had influenced few generations of Indians since the early 1800. Records of the Maharajah's generously rewarding good wrestlers, financially supporting wrestling schools and even themselves being wrestlers can be found in the Indian history. By early 1900, after the decline of the empires, that role had been taken over by the rich and the wealthy across the cities and villages. However poor a village may be, passionate wrestlers somehow managed to garner support for provision of a piece of land that worked as an 'Akhada' or a wrestling ring whose floor was thoroughly prepared with dry and fine soil that protected them from sever shocks and injuries. A passionate senior wrestler or two would go round the village pulling young men out of their beds, gather them for Suryanamaskars, teach them wrestling for hours and only then release them, but not before serving them a huge mug of hot fresh, milk. Such groups of young men would then bring great pride and glory to the village by winning the inter-village championships. Interestingly, the role of village 'security personnel' would also have to be taken up by such groups of wrestlers. This was partly due to the in-effective police force with it's scarce resources, and partly compelled due to the widespread activities of the dacoits and outlaws there. One such supporter of wrestling in the Mhasve village was Mr. Sukhlal Pardeshi who consistently spread the passion of wrestling among the kids and young men. The fervor of wrestling had influenced Guruji at a very young age. He would later be a champion wrestler among the surrounding villages, come to be known as a 'Ustad' (Master) of wrestling and establish twenty-odd wrestling schools in the periphery of the 'Jalgaon' district. That was Guruji's identity in the rural society before he migrated to the Bombay (now 'Mumbai') city and at times, the inevitable responsibility of the safety of the elders and women in the village also fell upon his and his wrestler's shoulders.

Another passion which almost always came hand-in-hand together with the SuryaNamaskars and wrestling was that of a peculiar an Indian Pole-gymnastics called “Malla-Khamb”. Gymnasts perform awesome postures and acrobatics on a wooden pole that stands approximately fifteen foot high. It demands a very flexible body, extreme strength and a firm grip of the limbs on the pole. Readers can view this excellent sport on the following YouTube link and associated videos <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRXzbPzGwZA&feature=related>. Guruji had mastered the acrobatic movements of ‘Tedhi’ (knot), ‘Ajgar-tedhi’ (Python knot), ‘Bajrang-Adhi’, Mayurasan (Peacock stance), ‘Bhujang-Pavitra’ (Serpant Stance), Monkey Jump etc of this Malla-Khamb gymnastics. Says the writer of Guruji’s biography – ‘Excelling in what-ever that he took up was Guruji’s characteristics.’ This passion to excel is not merely a struggle to stay ahead of others. It is a sincere effort to discover the beauty of action and life itself. The happiness hidden in action and work can be revealed only by being one with the work with passionate efforts.

10. Teenage activities at Mhasve Village

In the slow moving village life, Guruji was still left with ample time in spite of his Barber's profession and the farming. His young blood and the ever energetic mind couldn't allow him to sit idle. He gathered the village boys who had been wasting their time with unproductive activities. Together they formed a troop of the 'Powada' vocal art.. A form of vocal folk music, this 'Powada' is at the heart of the culture of the western Indian state of Maharashtra. It's lyrics is dedicated for the praise of war heroes, describing their acts of valor and is such that it can bring the audience to the edge of the seat. Accompanied by drums, it is sung in high volume. The singer should have very strong voice as well as strong lungs. As a young boy Guruji had developed great liking for these 'Powadas'. He also wrote his own lyrics for the Powadas. A few trial shows were done within the village with Guruji as the lead singer. Guruji's strong voice and the inspiring lyrics of the Powada songs would mesmerize the crowd. Soon, people from some neighboring villages invited their troop and within a few months, the troop became popular in the surrounding villages and the nearby Jalgaon town.

Guruji and his team also started off a few religious celebrations ('Ganesh Jayanti', 'Nava-Ratri' etc.). This brought an excellent energy and team building within the village. In addition they took help of some village elders and started off a Gymnasium to train young boys in Surya-Namaskars, Wrestling and Mall-Khamb (a traditional form of gymnastics described in the earlier chapter).

Mass leaders of those days did not have at their disposal any social networking media such as the facebook, twitter etc. They and their followers had to travel across the country to propagate their message. One such follower of Mahatma Gandhi by the name of 'Sane Guruji' was very actively spreading Gandhis' message of non-violence through the narration of stories. He was widely respected because he almost personified the values that he taught – non-violence, compassion, humbleness etc. This 'Sane-Guruji' spotted our Guruji in one of his tours and inquired about who was this young boy full of energy and zest. A meeting was set up and Guruji was included in the band of his volunteers. Guruji's task was to entertain the crowd that had gathered prior to 'Sane-Guruji's ' speech with his 'Powada' troop. Guruji and his troop happily provided this service with the intention of fulfilling their duty towards the nation.

11. A short association with the RSS

As the days passed, Guruji's social activities within the village were taking momentum. The enrollment at his gymnasium was growing. Under Guruji's guidance, the village boys were attaining good skills in wrestling, Suryanamaskars and 'mallakhamb'. Several boys from the nearby villages too started attending Guruji's Gymnasium. Over a period, the word reached the local activists of a Nationalist organization called 'RSS' which was spearheading the Freedom struggle of India under the strong leadership of the great Dr. Hedgewar. Unlike the moderate Indian National Congress lead by Gandhi, Dr. Hedgewar's 'RSS' believed in direct confrontation with the British and was guided by a Hardline Philosophy. The movement had attracted mostly higher caste intellectuals and was coordinated by them. Guruji was always impressed by the awesome discipline, organization and the widespread network of the RSS branches across India. After hearing about Guruji's wrestling and training skills, the RSS activists in the nearby villages approached Guruji. They wanted Guruji to provide Physical training to the young RSS volunteers. For this, Guruji must travel to the nearby villages and provide training every day for a few hours. There was no compensation offered or ever received, but Guruji's passion and the high regards for the RSS compelled him to take up the responsibility. Right from his young days, Guruji had a peculiar way of working..... he used to throw himself fully into the work he had undertaken, putting his heart and soul into it. This gave him tremendous energy and focus. He now did the same and soon became popular in those RSS branches. The work gave him dual satisfaction – one of following his passion in Physical training and second of contributing in a small way towards the freedom of his motherland. Yet, this pleasant association with the RSS was going to reveal him a grave reality. As Guruji used to provide his training, two tribal kids regularly watched him, taking keen interest in his instructions. One day, the boys gathered courage and approached Guruji to include them in the training. Guruji agreed and started training them together with the other volunteers. However, to Guruji's surprise, the coordinators of that branch asked Guruji to immediately stop training the boys. The reason – they were low caste tribals and there was no way that they could be trained together with the rest of the higher caste volunteers! This may not be the RSS's policy, but this was the way the local RSS activists conducted. Needless to say, this was a wake-up call to Guruji and he decided to leave the RSS. The sad faces of the sweet tribal kids could't fade away from Gurji's memory. The incidence had a lasting impact on Guruji and he was more than ever determined not to make any discrimination among his students what so ever. This rule, he followed strictly throughout his life, freely distributing his knowledge to every good learner

12. The 'Bhilla' tribals

As mentioned earlier, Guruji was supporting his family through the barber's services that he provided to the villagers and through some farming. His age should be around 18 years by now. His father's health was deteriorating by the day. At the same time the meager income he earned was not enough to support the family properly. He decided to take another job. There were a few preserved forests in and around the 'Raver' district. The government had assigned some contractors to protect the forests. The contractors in turn were given permits to carry out limited logging in those forests. These forest contractors employed a pool of security personnel to guard the forests. This security force was mainly formed by recruiting the forest dwelling 'Bhilla' tribals. Tall, dark and extremely well built, these 'Bhillas' were feared for their ruthlessness and combative capabilities. One of the forest contractors of a nearby forest called 'Kadji-Mundane' offered Guruji a job to supervise these 'Bhillas'. The salary offered was attractive - Indian Rupees six per month! Guruji took up the offer and left his home for the forest. After settling down in the new job, he started training the 'Bhilla' kids in wrestling during his spare time in the evenings. The soft sand on the shores of a stream in the 'Kadji-Mundane' forest offered ideal flooring for the wrestling practice. As usual, Guruji imparted the training with all his love and without holding on to any 'secrets' in his art. Due to this, he quickly became popular, not only among the kids, but among their parents too. So much so that Guruji hardly had to cook for himself, the meals being mostly sent by one or the other 'Bhilla' family.

This association with the 'Bhilla' tribals provided Guruji with an exceptional learning opportunity. The 'Bhillas', for generations, had acquired and mastered the art of healing through herbs. They had detailed knowledge of identifying the forest herbs, recipes of the concoctions, their dosages, the precise planetary configurations required for the herbs to be effective etc. From his childhood, Guruji always had a keen interest in this area. As explained earlier, his association with the 'Nath-Sampradaya' adepts had also provided him this know-how. His mother had also taught him several herbal remedies. In the current job as a forest supervisor, once again Guruji learned as many herbal remedies as he could and enriched himself.

As months passed, Guruji was learning more about these forest dwelling tribals. These 'Bhillas', although strong and agile, were slaves to the addiction of alcohol. This addiction had severely limited their earnings. Their entire society was riddled with poverty. The brunt of all this, as always, was taken by their women who struggled to provide for their children. The contractors would then exploit these women and girls sexually for meager returns. Many of them were led into prostitution by these contractors. The whole scenario brought great disgust and saddened Guruji. There seemed to be no end to the sufferings of these tribal women. As Guruji was grasping this situation, one of the 'Bhilla' girls unexpectedly offered herself to Guruji. Shocked

with the offer, Guruji pleaded with her to leave him alone, telling her that 'she was like a sister' to him. It was a spontaneous response out of his strong commitment to high moral standards and his natural respect towards women. This response from a strong young man was never expected by the young girl. Ashamed, she addressed him as 'Dada' (elder brother) and left him alone. The incidence however was enough to make Guruji realize that this was not the place for a young, married man to stay for too long. Within days, Guruji packed-off and returned back to his village. Yet, little did he know that in future, destiny would once again bring him and his family to reside in a similar environment to uplift the prostitutes. But more about that, at a later time....

13. A Clash with the Power

In the earlier Part, we saw that Guruji decided to leave the Supervisor's job at the 'Kadji-Mundane' forest and return to his 'Mhasve' village.

Upon return to his village, Guruji once again started off his social activities there. With no parallel leadership available, the young boys at the village had been eagerly waiting for his return. The moment Guruji was back, they quickly re-grouped around him and the teams started off their assigned activities without losing any time. The Gymnasium, once again sprung back to life with the wrestling, SuryaNamaskars, Malla-Khamb and Sword fights. The 'Powada' vocal music group, once again started their shows. Similarly the teams organizing the yearly village fair and other yearly celebrations started off their work. Guruji personally coordinated all the teams. His energy, hands-on approach, meticulous planning and a keen eye for the details ensured every activity went smoothly. The fact that every event was attaining great success was no mere coincidence. Guruji had skillfully built up a very strong team of his volunteers, leading by example in every area. The boys had such camaraderie that there was no room for self-centered acts, narrow mindedness and misunderstandings. The acceptance of Guruji's leadership among the boys was so much that his word was regarded as final. They were willing to go to a great extent to execute his assigned tasks. Interestingly, even the boys from the higher caste families had whole heartedly accepted Guruji's leadership. Very often, when individuals group together for a purpose or for a passion, any social barriers such as caste, religion, financial status etc are broken down. Guruji's team too, was a mix of all the religions and castes with an intense friendship and mutual love among them.

Isolated from the main village was a locality called 'Dalit-wada'. It was assigned specifically for the lower-most class of the society called 'Dalits' who were engaged in activities like cleaning the drains, disposing the dead bodies of cattle etc. It was a living hell in terms of cleanliness and hygiene. All over the locality were overflowing drains, stink and rotten bodies of dead animals. The residents, blissfully ignorant of the importance of cleanliness, stayed in those pathetic conditions for years after years. By nature, Guruji had zero-tolerance for unclean environment and this made him restless whenever he thought about this locality. Finally, he embarked upon something which no one had ever imagined of. He started a hands-on campaign to clean this 'Dalit-wada' together with his band of volunteers and friends. His team not only transformed the whole 'Dalit-wada' into a clean and neat place, they also created the awareness of hygiene and cleanliness among the residents. Once again, Guruji's friends actively supported him.

While his team was showering him with love, there was another group of individuals whom he was disappointing extremely. Although the new generation seemed to have overcome the prejudices of caste and creed, their parents had the least interest in opening their hearts. They

could'nt take it that their children would follow a boy from a lower caste, working with brooms and spades in their hands. They discussed this with the village heads and demanded fast actions from the village heads. As for the village heads, they too were very angered that a major proportion of the importance they enjoyed among the villagers was being taken away by Guruji and his team. In spite of repeated warnings, Guruji and his team had gone ahead with several events for the good of the villagers. Multiple threats and attempts to coerce Guruji had not worked. The increasing influence that 'Pundya' (as Guruji was called in his young days) yielded among the villagers was way beyond their tolerance. Something had to be done about this boy. The village heads finally decided to send killers to get rid of Guruji once and for ever. For readers born and brought up in a civilized society, it would not make any sense that people could go to the extent of killing someone just due to his growing influence. But those who know the extent of the hostilities among various social factions (such as caste, religion etc), will be able to make a sense of it. For example, in a separate incidence, the same village heads had beaten up a low-caste boy to death just because he had failed to deliver an important message.

In the next chapter, we will learn about how the assault on Guruji's life was planned and what happened thereafter.

14. An assault on life

In the earlier chapter we learned that Guruji's social activities had angered the village heads and they planned to kill him. The current chapter holds an important lesson to anyone engaged in doing good to the society in one form or other. Such an endeavor, although with the best of the intentions, may present obstructions, mild or severe. As such, the path of service is seldom a smooth ride. One's strength lies in his or her tenacity to continue to walk on the path of service in spite of the obstructions along the way.

So, it was decided to murder Guruji. The celebrations at the Village Goddess temple culminated to their peak on the eighth night ('Ashtami') of the 'Navaratri' celebrations and attracted a huge crowd from the surrounding villages. This was an ideal night for the assault since everyone's attention would be on the celebrations and Guruji could be cornered in the dark road without anyone's notice. The trap was laid down in such a way that only God could save Guruji.

And God did save Guruji. As mentioned earlier, the 'Bhilla' tribals in and around the Mhasve village were cruel and ruthless warriors with huge and masculine bodies. Many of them were infamous dacoits. One such 'Bhilla' dacoit carried a prize on his head, and yet dared to move around openly, flashing his dreaded axe. His son, Ramsing, was an excellent wrestler and would challenge Guruji in the final round of the yearly wrestling championship. After losing the championship to Guruji continuously for few years, he was frustrated and seeking revenge. Ramsing was thus a natural choice of the village heads in their hired gang of killers.

Ramsing had agreed to join the gang, but his conscience was pricking him. At the back of his mind, he knew he was doing something terribly wrong. On the night of the assault, Guruji finished his prayers and started making his way home through the thick crowd outside the temple. The attackers, including Ramsing, were following Guruji, ready to attack him when he would reach a lonely spot along the way back home. Still making his way through the crowd, Guruji did see one or two of the attackers whom the village heads frequently used to execute their sins. But he did not realize that today they were after no one other than him. As Ramsing closely tracked Guruji, there was a storm of thoughts in his mind whether he should do this or not.

And purely by the grace of God, Ramsing changed his mind! He walked to Guruji and shouted in his ears "Hey Pundya, run for your life. They are after you." and quickly disappeared in the crowd. Hearing those words from Ramsing, Guruji suddenly realized why the henchmen of the village-heads were seen around. Without wasting a moment, he ran as fast he could, out of the crowd and towards his home. Some of the henchmen followed Guruji with the weapons, but Guruji's pace was so fast that they could not catch up with him. Guruji later mentioned that it was only God's grace and his own physical ability (to run fast) that saved his life. In the days to

come, Guruji and Ramsing became close friends. He would now actively participate in Guruji's social activities together with other young boys like Avchit Pardeshi, Yakub Miya, Jeyaram Shete, Santosh Patil, Dayaram Patil etc. Possibly, the very fact that Ramsing was now his close friend discouraged the village-heads from making further attempts of aggression on him. Such an attack on life could have instilled fear in an average person and deterred him from carrying out any further Social work. But Guruji's resolve to continue his activities became even stronger. After all, didn't his role models like Gandhiji, Sane Guruji, Gadge Baba etc face similar difficulties on their path? However, with this incidence, Guruji realized that Mhasve was not the place for him to stay longer and he could attain much more success elsewhere by investing same amount of his time and effort.

15. Father's demise and entry into the Police Force

In Part-3 it was mentioned that Guruji's father, Mr. Ramachandra played the 'Bheri' instrument and was frequently invited to play this instrument in the nearby villages. The 'Bheri' instrument would exert physical stress on the kidneys of the musician. Also, the musical nights would deprive the musicians of the night's sleep. Musicians who played the 'Bheri' would eventually succumb to kidney troubles at the later parts of their lives. Guruji's father's health had deteriorated greatly due to the kidney trouble. Guruji was twenty now. One day, his father became seriously ill. Guruji brought him to the best available hospital in the vicinity – Dr. Godbole's hospital in the nearby 'Chopda' district. Guruji remembers a gush of water coming out from his father's bladder as Dr. Godbole cut a small hole into his father's pelvis. Although the doctor did this minor surgery and sent the patient home, he gave a hint to Guruji that his father's days were numbered. Accordingly, Guruji's father passed away in the next few days. Guruji was twenty then and this was around the year 1937.

The responsibility of the family was already on Guruji's young shoulders, but now his moral support was gone as well. About two years passed on. He had to act fast for a securing a better earning. He had always eyed a job in the Indian Police force, but the earlier attempts to join the Police force using his network had failed. However, after a few months, his application was successful and he received a letter to attend the selection process at the Jalgaon Police Academy.

An event that took place at the selection gives us a hint of the 'never give up' attitude of Guruji. He made through the first round of selection of the physical tests and was asked to queue up for the second round of selection together with the other selected twenty odd candidates. As he waited eagerly for the challenges of the second round, a second assessor took over. To Guruji's dismay, this second assessor separated him from the rest of the boys, asked him to stand in one corner and calmly continued the assessment of the rest of the boys. As Guruji stood there for a long time, a British officer suddenly appeared there to supervise the selection process. This was non other than the Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), Mr. Antiya. After observing the assessment for a few minutes, the DSP pointed to Guruji and asked the officer "Why is this boy standing there?". The assessor replied "He is too small sized." Although Guruji couldn't speak English, he understood the substance of the conversation and addressed to the assessor "I am small sized but I can challenge any of these guys for wrestling or running.". The DSP asked for the translation of what Guruji was talking and was curious to assess Guruji. The remaining candidates were asked to take the challenge from Guruji. A six footer giant among them took up the challenge to wrestle with Guruji. As a village wrestling champion, Guruji already had the confidence in himself. On top of that, this was a matter of survival. Guruji put all his efforts and after a few minutes of wrestling, managed to throw the

giant on the floor and press his back on the ground for a few moments! Awe-struck by this feat, the DSP, the Assessor and the candidates all cheered Guruji. Needless to say, Guruji got selected. Once again his physical abilities had come in as a great boon. In a few more days he got the appointment letter. His mother had mixed feelings. Finally her efforts to educate Guruji had paid off and that gave her a great sense of achievement. On the other hand, her son would now stay away from her, possibly for her lifetime. But she granted him the permission with the view of his career and development. Finally Guruji joined the police force. This was year 1939. He was to remain with the police force for the rest of his life, until retirement.

16. Police Training at Jalgaon and Posting to Raver

The physical training at Jalgaon Police Academy was for a period of one year. As compare to the other candidates, the laborious training was going comparatively easier for Guruji due to his past wrestling and athletic training.

Barely fifteen days into the training and a curious incident took place. A delegation of fifteen to twenty men from Guruji's 'Mhasve' village presented itself in front of the DSP, Mr. Antiya. They pleaded him to send Guruji back to their village. They reasoned that Guruji was much more needed in the village rather than the Police force. They explained to Mr. Antiya, all the good work that Guruji had carried out. Of course, the DSP told them that he was neutral and that this was a choice Guruji should make for himself. The group then approached Guruji. He explained to them that there were two reasons he would stay in the Police force – one for his own prospects and secondly because he had suffered enough at the hands of the village heads. Disappointed, the delegation went back to the Mhasve village and gave a proper counseling to the village heads.

Following Guruji's foot-steps, most of the youngsters left the Mhasve village in search of good jobs and settled elsewhere. All the cultural activities suddenly came to a stand-still due to lack of leadership as well as volunteers. The bubbling energy of the volunteers was not seen again. The mean tactics of the local governance had killed the initiative and motivation of the youngsters. An eerie silence was to reign the Mhasve village for years to come.

A year down the road and Guruji successfully completed the training at Jalgaon Police Academy. He knew that he had achieved this purely by his merits and that boosted his confidence. Aside from that, within this year, he also gained some popularity within the Police force due to his vocal performances as well as some demonstrations of his physical strength. The completion of the training was followed with an assignment of traffic control for a few months and then a posting to the nearby 'Raver' township. Guruji's stay at this 'Raver' township was going to shape his social life and his leadership qualities further.

It was year 1940 when Guruji was posted to the 'Raver' township. Guruji liked the small town the moment he stepped into it. The place was full of greenery. The idol in the temple of the goddess at the entrance of the town reminded him of the 'Janajani' goddess at his birthplace. The town had a significantly big market place. The population was a mix of various religions and sub-castes. To his surprise several people in Raver already knew about him as an expert wrestler, an athlete and a physical trainer. This was mostly due to his earlier activities at Mhasve village and during the training at Jalgaon. From day-one in Raver, Guruji started communicating with the locals to understand the situation there in terms of law and order. It was realized that one particular community had intensely taken up to crime and was dreaded

by the entire town. Prominent gangsters regularly collected protection money from the traders and shopkeepers. Sexual harassment of women was rampant. In general, the place was not safe for women. Of course all this was possible only because the criminals worked hand in glove with the police. Destiny had presented Guruji this challenging environment to fulfill his duty as a Policeman.

17. Mr. Agarwal of Raver

In the earlier episode, we learned about Guruji's posting to the lawless 'Raver' township. As Guruji started his duty in the town, an incident brought him in contact with a person who would, in future be his close friend and a prominent partner in his social activities at Raver. Barely a few months into his posting, this acquaintance would bring Guruji at the centre of a movement that would transform the 'Raver' town. This was Mr. Balkishan Agarwal, a well known businessman in Raver. He owned a big, multi-storey house in the centre of Raver market. In fact, for a long time, Mr. Agarwal had been restless about the ongoing lawless situation in Raver and wanted to do something about it. On several occasions, he had opened the topic with his friends, but was unable to get a good response from them.

One afternoon as Mr. Agarwal finished his lunch and peeped out of his second floor window, he saw a big crowd gathered on the road right in front of his house. At the centre was a young girl crying, hiding her face in both her hands. A small sized, but agile young policeman was 'disciplining' a huge guy. The policeman, with professional expertise, had 'sent his message' on both sides of the big guy's head bringing him to the floor. By the time Mr. Agarwal ran down to the centre of the crowd, the small but well built policeman had a strong grip of his arm around the giant's neck and was calmly asking the girl if she wanted to file a report to the police. Upon closer observation, Mr. Agarwal found out that the huge guy struggling helplessly in the policeman's grip was none other than Hasan, the son of a notorious gangster. No police had ever dared to touch him so far. Out of fear, the girl refused to file a report. The huge guy was released with a few more 'reminders' on both sides of his face to re-enforce the earlier 'message'. Astounded with the whole episode, Mr. Agarwal invited the policeman to his home for a short chat. The policeman was none other than Guruji. He explained to Mr. Agarwal that he had spotted the guy following the girl making vulgar comments and that the girl had asked for his help. As they chatted for a while, Mr. Agarwal could clearly see the spark and zest in Guruji. He could see that he was full of courage and confidence and the size of the problem was a non-issue for him. In this first meeting itself, Mr. Agarwal knew that this is the man he wanted. In Guruji, he found a dim hope of some improvement in the lawless Raver.

The above incidence was Guruji's first clash in an endless chain of friction with the gangsters of Raver. Guruji vowed to change the situation in Raver. He was particularly intolerant to the humiliation and harassment that the women of Raver were going through. As seen time and again in Guruji's life, he refused to accept the existing poor social conditions and just live with it. Each time, he led the masses to turn around the situation and make a life better for all.

Over the weeks, his acquaintance with Mr. Agarwal grew into a close friendship. Both of them gathered more like minded friends. Strangely, although the group had no past acquaintance

with Guruji, they naturally took him as their leader. We see this phenomenon repeating several times throughout Guruji's life. His persona was such that those coming in contact with him felt a natural respect and a strong bond with him in the first few meetings itself. Volunteers working with him got an inner fulfillment by contributing to his mission. (In case of Mr. Agarwal, the bond was so lasting and strong that in his old age, Mr. Agarwal insisted to have Guruji next to him in the last moments of life, something that Guruji could fulfill)

In the next Chapter of Gurusandhan we will learn more about how Guruji and his team moved the masses of Raver against the criminals.

18. The Movement in Raver

In Part-17, the readers saw that Guruji, Mr. Agarwal and some of their friends decided to rise up against the crime. Mr. Agarwal's house was transformed into a rendezvous where the friends constantly brainstormed and planned the further activities. In general it was agreed that the corrupt police force in Raver is going to be of no use and it would be a waste of time and energy to attempt getting help from them. The team agreed to gather the youth of Raver, train them physically and for combat and form a resistance force against the criminals. Mr. Agarwal had a wide network among the government officials due to his business dealings. In a few months, he acquired a place for a gymnasium where Guruji would provide training to the youngsters. This gave birth to the 'Ambika Vijay' gymnasium. Upon Guruji's insist, a small temple of 'Maruti' (or 'Anjaneyar', the deity of Character, strength and valor) was built at its entrance.

Having a plan and a gymnasium was one thing, engaging the people in the movement was another. For creating the awareness among the people against the crime and getting young boys to join their mission, Guruji once again resorted to his cultural programs. Forming a troop, they went from lane to lane within the town and did their performances. People were attracted by the entertainment of vocal and instrumental music, humor, drama etc, but the acts and songs sent a clear message for them to rise up against the crime. The message appealed to the people who had for long, suffered under the atrocities of the gangs. Not only did they look upon Guruji as their leader, they also quickly accepted Guruji as their own man. Women and men encouraged their young children to join Guruji's gym and his fight against the crime.

The 'Ambika Vijay' gymnasium was inaugurated with a major celebration. Within no time the gym was buzzing with activity under Guruji's leadership. Surya-namaskars, Push-ups, Sit ups, Weight lifting, wrestling etc were taught to the candidates. The gangs were heavily armed and it was essential to equip the boys with relevant skills before they confronted the dangerous gangsters. Guruji trained them in combat with spears, sword, axes, 'dand-patta' (a razor-edged, flexible, 6-foot long metal belt), a weapon called 'Barchi' etc. More importantly, Guruji constantly gave motivating talks to the youngsters so as to prepare them mentally to stand up and fight against the crime in Raver. His message was clear .. either firmly resist the gangsters or lose your and your family's dignity. Over a period the younger generation of Raver gathered courage.

The movement started by Guruji and Mr. Agarwal was taking its shape and momentum day-by-day. The 'Ambika Vijay' gym was the centre for the boys to build their teams and coordinate their activities. Here, they planned their resistance to the crime gangs. At times by negotiations, at times by threats, but mostly through combats, Guruji and his team started building their

front. The unity gave them more courage day by day. Guruji and his boys started head-on collision with the gangs, one gang at a time, bringing them to their knees. Needless to say, the fights were brutal and fierce. Such was the fury of the masses that some of the gangsters were left disabled for life. But this was the only way to instill fear in the hardened criminals. This initial downfall of some of the gangs motivated more and more boys to join force. The residents of Raver had suffered enough and they were willing to risk their lives for the cause. They had great hope in Guruji's leadership to harness the scattered strength of Raver. One wonders how the flower of Yoga could have bloomed in Guruji's heart in spite of the violent environments he was subjected to and he had to act upon.

The boys returned home from the gym and talked about Guruji to their parents. Soon Guruji became a household name in Raver. His close interaction with the people, his mannerism and his dedicated leadership was greatly admired by everyone. Households in Raver looked at Guruji as one of their family members, fondly addressing him as 'Mama' or 'Maternal Uncle' in the local language. With great love towards him, the residents had presented Guruji with a gift which wasn't really as beautiful as their emotions. It was a hunter weighing one-and-a-half Kilogram and Guruji was expected to use it to discipline the criminals!

What surprises one is the constant moral support Guruji received from his wife and his mother during this period. He had already moved the family to Raver within a few weeks from his posting. It was impossible that the family could be immune from the risky mission that Guruji had taken up. One can only imagine the courage that the women in Guruji's family could have demonstrated during the four years of stay at Raver.

19. Surviving in the Police Force

After about an year's work in Raver Police, the boss of the Police Station appreciated Guruji's work and offered Guruji to be his assistant. The designation of this boss was 'Fauzdar' and was a prominent post in context of the rural surroundings. In the 1940's, a car was reserved mostly for the British bosses. The Fauzdars were provided with a horse-cart called 'Baggi'. Guruji was first excited to assist this important position only to be disillusioned later.

As mentioned earlier, the Police department at Raver was riddled with extreme corruption. The criminals took very good care of the Police, providing them with cash, gifts, liquor, women etc. Guruji's boss was no exception. He thoroughly enjoyed every pleasure that was provided to him. Ironically, everything that Guruji had a deep disgust for was dear to his boss. Around Raver, along the river 'Tapi' was a terrain of marshy lands, hills and valleys. The villages in this terrain were populated by the dangerous and lawless 'Beldar' community. In wakes of major crimes, the 'Fauzdar' had to travel to those villages. He always insisted to have Guruji alongside for such investigations. On such occasions, Guruji had to drive his horse cart. Invariably every time, the boss was provided with sumptuous dinners and abundant liquor after they finished their work. At times, on the way back, Guruji had to drop him into a red-light lane where the Fauzdar would stay with the prostitutes. It was a tough balancing act for Guruji in holding on to his high standards of morals on one hand and on the other hand, keeping such morally degraded colleagues happy. His commitment to his morals was literally put to test. There were several attempts by the colleagues 'indoctrinate' Guruji into their vices. But so strong was his faith in the teachings of his mother and his role models, he remained totally free of any such acts. While corrupt wealth and alcohol were subjects of disgust for him, he had always seen women as the embodiment of his chosen deity, Goddess Ambika. After a few failed attempts to corrupt Guruji, the boss and other colleagues left him alone.

As months passed, Guruji had to handle several tasks to fulfill his duties. At times as a crime-writer, at times as a spy with disguise and at other times as a member of the arrest squad, he was learning the skills of policing hands-on. Very often, he had to interrogate the arrested suspects and 'make them talk'. Hard nuts to crack as they were, torture was inevitable. Extracting information from those hardened criminals was physically painful for them and mentally disturbing for Guruji. After the interrogations finished and the bosses had gone back home, Guruji used to prepare herbal medicines in the evening and apply them to the tortured individuals in the night. Effectively, many of these guys developed a bond of friendship with Guruji. Some of them improved their life with Guruji's good advice gave away their ugly ways of life. Ironically, as Guruji often lamented that he managed to improve some of criminals but

there was not a single policeman whom he could save from the corrupt lifestyle. Most of them destroyed their lives with alcohol and womanizing.

In such a working environment and the lawless state of affairs, Guruji often had to conduct operations where his life was put to stakes. One such operation merits a dedicated Chapter in the history of his life. That shall be our next chapter.

20. Operation Rasalpur

In the corrupt Police force, at rare occasions, Guruji did come in contact with some colleagues who had excellent work ethics and were worthy of respect. One of them was a boss out of the several bosses he had worked for. This was Fauzdar Madhav Marathe. A dare devil combatant with great respect towards women, Mr. Marathe was a person of clean character. His philosophy of life was that of a true soldier – “One has to die anyway. Let’s die fighting for a good cause. “ Both of them had mutual respect towards each other and worked closely together in almost every Criminal case they handled. Their intelligence gathering and lightning speed of actions was bringing significant pressure on the criminal world of Raver. Conducting raids in the odd hours of the night in the remote villages around Raver, these two had earned respect among the citizens and fear among the criminals. After months of working with him, Guruji expressed that small victories over the criminals was not enough and a quantum improvement in the law and order of Raver was needed. This could be attained only by gaining control over the epicenter of crime in Raver – the Rasalpur village.

This Rasalpur was under the control of two dreaded gangsters – Mehboob and Samsher. Extremely cunning and ruthless, the entire region shivered by their names. Involved in every illegal activity ranging from flesh-trade to loan-sharking to protection money and ransoms, these two had spread their tentacles across the region. Striking at these two was not easy as they had heavily armed and large gangs. A very thorough study of the gang’s network and assessment of the gang’s strength was needed before any action could be taken. Accordingly, Guruji set off on his intelligence gathering. He had acquaintance with several residents of Rasalpur due to the vocal programmes and cultural activities he had organized at Rasalpur in the past. After talking to them, Guruji got good deal of information about the gangs, their hideouts etc. Most importantly, Guruji realized that the gang members had a strong belief that should anything go wrong, Mehboob and Samsher were capable to save them from any situation. This confidence of the gang members in their leadership was the back-bone of the gang’s moral. Fauzdar Marathe and Guruji discussed this and concluded that Mehboob and Samsher could be brought to knees if the gang member’s confidence in their leadership could be somehow shattered. To do this, they had to use brutal force.

They first formed a large team of young, strong Policemen and properly armed them. Next, the heavily armed team conducted raids at Rasalpur arresting several gang members. Now, the team started off their tactics to shatter the gang’s confidence in their leaders. The arrested gang members were purposely brought to Rasalpur’s public-gathering place (called ‘Chavdi’). Here, the gang members were tied upside down and beaten mercilessly. The screams of the gang members was an assertion of the police force and should be heard by the entire village. After hours of torture, it was brought to the notice of the tortured criminals that “look, your

saviors Mehboob and Samsheer did not arrive to save you.” The tortured guys were then released to spread this ‘enlightenment’ to the rest of their fellow gangsters. This exercise was repeated several times with various gang members and over a few months. Over a period, this seemed to work. The strength of Rasalpur gangs started to diminish. Disillusioned about their leader’s capability, the gang members started deserting the gangs. Once the gangs were scattered, it was much easier for the police to arrest them. This operation at Rasalpur, although brutal, created a permanent dent in the criminal activities at Raver. Fauzdar Marathe was greatly honored for this smart and daring operation, but he openly announced that had it not been for Guruji’s investigation, planning and execution, the operation would not have succeeded. This speaks volumes of the respect Guruji had earned from his superior at work.

This operation at Rasalpur brought a good deal of respect and honor to Fauzdar Marathe and Guruji. But the criminals at Rasalpur would not accept the defeat so easily. They would come back in vengeance with ugly tactics to get their revenge.

21. Rasalpur strikes back

In Part-20 we learned how Guruji and his boss (Fauzdar Marathe) destroyed the cartels of the Mafia in Rasalpur. The Police Force honored both of them for their courage and planning. Although the Dons of Rasalpur – Mehboob and Samsheer were now under control, they were not going to leave Guruji and Fauzdar Marathe to be at peace. First, they targeted the Fauzdar. Using some women from the Rasalpur village, they launched a disgusting complaint against the Fauzdar. It was alleged that in the course of interrogations, Fauzdar Marathe forced the women and their children to drink his urine! Guruji knew this was not true. The complaint was taken very seriously. The matter was even more sensitive since the complaint came from women of the minority community. No bosses in the Police Force wanted to take the risk to support Fauzdar Marathe. He was immediately rusticated from the duty, pending further investigations. Over a period, the wheels of politics turned in such a way that the honest Fauzdar Marathe was permanently removed from the Police Force. This was a classic example of the dire consequences that a dutiful officer in India has to face in absence of proper backing from higher authorities.

After taking care of Fauzdar Marathe, the Dons of Rasalpur waited for an opportunity to settle their score with Guruji.

By now, Guruji's fame as an excellent wrestler and a Master of the 'Malla-Khamb' pole gymnastics had reached the bosses in the Police Force. The city of Jalgaon hosted the Grand yearly gathering of the Regional Police. It was a matter of pride and honor to get an invitation to perform at this Annual Gathering and only the most skillful of the Police staff were invited to do so. This year, Guruji was invited to demonstrate his skills. Guruji and his team were thrilled with the invitation and immediately started their preparations. They selected their most popular shows for the event. One of his shows in particular was most sought after. To the awe of the crowd, Guruji would let a loaded truck be driven over his chest. The extremely dangerous demonstration involved both – physical strength as well as breath control. The preparations were going well and to the satisfaction of the team. On the day of the demonstrations, the team was fully prepared and in good spirits. Only one concern remained The driver assigned by the Police force to carry the loaded truck over Guruji's chest hailed from Rasalpur !! Guruji's friends warned the driver again and again not to play any tricks.

On the day of the celebration, one demonstration after another from Guruji's team was systematically shown. The crowd was dumbfounded with the feats of Malla-khamb and Human Pyramids from Guruji's team. Then came the grand finale of Guruji's show of carrying the loaded truck over the chest. The truck was driven into the open ground and Guruji lied down on his back at the prescribed spot. Guruji had firmly tied both his hands in front, holding the

opposite biceps with his iron grip. Knowing that Guruji was now ready, Guruji's friends signaled the driver to drive the truck close to Guruji. The truck approached and stopped few feet away from Guruji. The crowd held its breath. No one wanted to blink, lest they would miss the critical moment. Guruji took a deep breath and stiffened his body. Every muscle of his sculpted body was full blown, hard as a stone and ready to take the truck over it. Guruji's friends again signaled the driver, this time to finally drive the truck over Guruji's chest.

The Rasalpur lad knew that this was his moment of revenge!

He was instructed to drive the truck over the chest quickly. Instead, he brought the front wheels over Guruji's chest and applied the brakes. His intention was to keep the loaded truck over Guruji's chest for a longer time, hoping that Guruji would lose his breath and get crushed under the truck's weight. Guruji realized that something was wrong. But he kept his cool and retained the breath. In the meantime, Guruji's friends shouted aloud scolding the driver. Collector Khan who was the Guest Of Honor realized what the driver was up to. Furious at what was happening, he slammed his wooden cane on the table and shouted at the driver. The driver realized that his trick is not going un-noticed and quickly drove the truck down from Guruji's chest. Relieved from the massive weight, Guruji slowly breathed out and moved away from the truck. The crowd, un-aware of what exactly happened, cheered Guruji for a long time. Collector Khan shook hands with Guruji and asked about his well-being. He pointed out to Guruji that what the driver had done was an attempt of murder with several witnesses. He offered Guruji to take action on the driver as he himself had witnessed the whole incidence. After thinking for a few moments, Guruji denied to lodge any formal complaint against the driver. Guruji's friends were not surprised by this. They knew forgiving was his nature. Instead of focusing on individual's faults, he had always focused on the bigger problems. With his kind heart, Guruji could quickly get the incidence out of his mind, but the scars of the truck wheel rubbing vigorously over his biceps and chest remained life-long.

22. Social Work at Raver

It appears that Guruji lead a pretty active and busy social life during the four year's of stay at Raver. His activities were aimed at injecting energy and life into the mundane and dull conditions prevalent in Raver society.

Part 18 already described about the 'Ambika Vijay' gym that Guruji initiated and the physical trainings that he provided to the youngsters at Raver. Aside from the training on handling weapons, he also trained the young boys in the 'Malla-khamb' pole gymnastics and Indian wrestling. A wrestler by the name Babhutsingh Rajput was highly respected in the region. Teams of wrestlers under his leadership contested and won medals in places as far as 'Burhanpur' district. Best of the boys trained by Guruji were picked by this Babhutshigh and included in his teams. Invariably in every season, these wrestlers trained by Guruji brought several medals in the leagues called 'Phuds'. That means the training provided by Guruji must have been at par with the prevalent standards. Such initiatives brought confidence and pride in the residents of Raver.

Guruji and his team also conducted cultural programmes with a focus on social awakening. They were entertaining due to the contents – humor, drama, vocal and instrumental music, dance, poetry etc., yet the message was never missed. For this, Guruji wrote his own poetry and lyrics for selected items in the shows. His poetry revolved around few topics – fight for justice, valor, kindness and faith in God. His lyrics for the 'Powada' folk-songs were devoted to historical war heroes, freedom fighters and even laymen who had done heroic deeds. For example, one of his 'Powada' was dedicated to a local martyr, Deepchand Supdu, who killed a man-eating tigress and laid down his own life in the fight. Another example is a 'Powada' he wrote in the praise of volunteers who nursed the injured kids when a local school building collapsed. Such contents of the cultural shows helped Guruji and his team greatly to awaken the masses and motivate them to get united and fight against the prevalent oppression by the lawless elements in that society.

We learn a great lesson from Guruji's conduct through-out his life – God resides not in the temples and altars, but in a kind and sharing heart. Invoke God, not by prayers and rituals, but by good deeds. From the days of his childhood until now, Guruji had been a very action oriented person. He did not believe that any success is possible without well-thought actions. In his own words, "Even mountains can be moved with action. Not even a small pebble can be turned by mere words." He had implemented this in his own life and the good results derived were giving him great fulfillment. Helping the poor in his capacity, providing free herbal medication, operating the Ambika Vijay gymnasium.... all this was making his life meaningful. The respect given by the residents of Raver was imparting good deal of Self-Confidence in him.

He was somewhat basking in this satisfaction when an incident suddenly rocked his life. An unexpected meeting with a young boy would change the course of his life. Bringing a divine call to him, this messenger of Yoga would convey to him that he has to work on something more meaningful than what he was doing. Within a few days, seeds of a life-long search would be sowed in him. This search would bring him to realms of life he had never been before. More about that in the next chapter

23. The Guru Arrives

In the history of mankind, we see a constant struggle for worldly pleasures, glories, inventions etc. While majority of mankind is constantly engaged in these, there is a small minority which rejects this worldly journey and takes up the inner journey of Spirituality. Although very small in numbers, these individuals, at different times and in different parts of the world, became the guiding lights for the rest of the humanity around them. What is interesting is some of these Spiritual Masters did not ask or consciously seek the inner Spiritual journey. It came upon them. Perceivably, nature did not follow any norms either in choosing these individuals or the way in which their lives are turned towards Spirituality. The chosen ones came from all walks of life – Emperors, slaves, priests, atheists, scholars, illiterates, chaste, prostitutes, kind-hearted, butchers etc. We also do not see any norm in the ways by which the course of their lives changed towards spirituality – some were initiated by other Spiritual Masters, some by the trauma of worldly losses, some by the realization of the momentary nature of the world while others by their overwhelming love towards God. It is our good fortune that Guruji was one of the chosen ones for the Spiritual journey.

It was just another evening for Guruji when he was training the wrestlers at his favorite 'Ambika Vijay' Gym. Suddenly a group of School boys entered the gym. "Mama, look whom we have brought. This is 'Bicchu'. He wants to meet you." (Guruji was fondly called 'Mama' or "Maternal uncle in Raver.). With the boys was a fifteen to sixteen year's old boy. The School boys had found him wandering in the vicinity of the Raver English School and had become his friends within no time. Very fair skinned, wearing just a saffron cloth below the waste, he looked very attractive and handsome. His long golden hair swayed with the wind behind his neck. The features were very sharp and the nose was very straight. Boldly, Bicchu stepped forward, looked straight into Guruji's eyes with his probing gaze and said, "Mama, I heard you are an excellent wrestler. You train the boys in martial arts and Pole-gymnastics. The gangsters here fear you. So I wanted to see you. Can you teach me what you are teaching these boys?"

There was stunning assertiveness and confidence in his speech.

"Oh Yes. Why not. When do you intend to start?" Guruji smiled and asked him.

"Anytime, Mama."

"Okay then. Your training starts now."

In the next part of Gurusandhan, we will learn how Guruji trained Bicchu. Interestingly, Bicchu had much more to share with Guruji. The formation of the bond between the two of them is an interesting example of the Master-Disciple relationship.

24. Mutual Learning

In the Part-22, we learned how young Bicchu approached Guruji and requested him to coach him.

Thereafter, Guruji started training him. To Guruji's delight, his grasping was very fast and his body very able. Like any other teacher who enjoys teaching a smart pupil, Guruji was very happy teaching him. What an average trainee took about three months to learn, Bicchu learned within three days. Guruji derived great satisfaction in training him. Each evening Bicchu arrived at the gym and learned the techniques from Guruji. He would be the last one to leave the gym together with Guruji. Most of the days, Guruji would bring him to his home for dinner. At Guruji's home, he mingled with the family members and chatted with them with such ease as though he knew everyone for years and as if he was a part of the family. Guruji and Bicchu would chat for long hours after the dinner on various topics. He would then stay over-night, sleeping next to Guruji. Guruji did not realize how days passed quickly in his company. What he did realize that within these few days, a strong bond was being formed between him and Bicchu. An irresistible attraction towards Bicchu was strangely overwhelming Guruji. In the later part of his life Guruji realized that the attraction he felt towards Bicchu was a resultant of the force of 'Oja-Shakti' whereby Yogis transmit their love and compassion towards their fellow beings.

It had been about eight days since Bicchu had arrived. After they finished the training late in the evening, Guruji said, "Come Bicchu, let's go home and have dinner. I am hungry."

"Me too" said Bicchu. They locked the 'Ambika Vijay' gym and went back to Guruji's home. As they waited for the dinner and chatted along, Bicchu said "Mama, you have taught me so many things. Today I want to show you what I know." Thereafter he demonstrated some strange feats which Guruji had never seen before. He showed Guruji how the stomach can be brought right until the back. He then showed how he could control the movements of the intestines to the left, right and centre of the stomach. Next, he showed him the hand stand. Slowly, taking away one hand, he stood steady on a single hand. But he didn't stop there. He stood only on the five fingers of the hand. In the final hand-stand, he showed Guruji how he can stand on a single finger! Guruji watched astounded. But the grand-finale was yet to come. He asked Guruji to touch his chest and feel his heartbeats. As Guruji was feeling his heartbeats, he suddenly stopped the beats and remained in that state for a few minutes. Next, he showed how the heartbeats can be moved from one part of the body to another. The beating of his heart could not be felt at the chest, but could be strongly felt at his navel. Then he stopped the beats at the navel and moved them to the back and so on.

Guruji was amazed by all this. He had himself mastered several physical abilities until now. That included carrying loaded trucks over his chest, breaking huge rocks with bare hand etc. But what this teen was demonstrating was a subtle physical control that he had never learned. Guruji quickly realized that what he just watched was the next level of body control. He must learn this.

Was Guruji able to learn all this? Did the young boy teach these feats to him, just as he had learned so much from Guruji? Let's understand more about this in the next Chapter.

25. An Opportunity slips, A Quest begins.

In part-23 learned how a bond was formed between Guruji and young Bicchu. We also learned about the strange feats of body control were demonstrated by Bicchu . Impressed with those demonstrations, Guruji was about to request Bicchu to coach him. But Alas! At this point, Guruji's ego of a teacher stepped in. He thought "If I openly ask him to teach me, I will lose my respect. Making such a request to a young chap who had been under my training would be a loss of dignity. I must try some indirect way to learn it from him." Thinking this, he quickly controlled his expressions and acted as if he was not too impressed and as if he was familiar with all this. This hesitation to learn under the influence of ego was something that Guruji would repent for his lifetime. The realization of this lost opportunity would drive him to become a life-long learner, willing to learn from whatever small opportunity available.

Later that evening, Guruji and Bicchu had dinner together and slept at night. As usual, Guruji woke up early morning, only to realize that Bicchu was not next to him. He searched for Bicchu around the house, but could not find him. Thinking that he would meet him at the Gym as usual in the evening, Guruji went off for his work. But to his sadness, Bicchu did not turn up at the Gym in the evening either. Days and weeks passed, but Bicchu was not to be found again. Guruji sent his boys in all directions around Raver to search for him, but to no avail. Guruji had not realized that a strong bond had been formed between him and Bicchu during their short acquaintance. A feeling of sadness overwhelmed Guruji due to his loss. Bicchu's sage-like persona, his words, his mannerisms couldn't be forgotten. Guruji lost sleep in his memories. It was as if a part of his existence itself had left him alone...incomplete... to struggle in dark ocean of the world. The gym, the wrestling, the pole-gymnastics, the victories over the gangsters, nothing could excite him any more.

In the months and years to come, Guruji used his contacts in the Police force to find Bicchu, but it was of no use. It was as if he had disappeared into thin air. Guruji had a strange feeling that Bicchu had come to teach him something, to change the course of his life, to open the doors for a more meaningful life, but he had failed to respond to Bicchu's call. He felt as if a great opportunity had slipped through his hands. The grief made him restless. His heart sank into the guilt that he had not done enough. A few weeks passed in this state. Later, he slowly got control of himself. His intuition told him that he should not stop here. He must find out what was the message that Bicchu wanted to give him. Working with dedication on Bicchu's subtle message will be like being close to Bicchu.

With a first instinct, he started talking about the feats that Bicchu had shown him to his close friends and relatives. Some of the elders pointed out that such a subtle control over the body could be possible only through Yoga. Could Bicchu be a Yogi? After all he looked so much like a

Yogi. Strong, flexible body, the bright aura around him, the shining eyes, the ever smiling face, the glowing skin, the strong and clear voice, the saffron cloth he wore on the waist oh yes. He must be a Yogi! “That’s it. Bicchu wanted me to learn Yoga. I still have time. I must learn Yoga” thought Guruji.

This was the moment when Guruji’s journey into Yoga started. This journey was going to be anything but a smooth sailing. Let’s learn more about his quest, his efforts and the results he derived in the early stage of practice...in the next chapter.

26. First attempt to learn Yoga.

In the last chapter we saw that young Bicchu kindled Guruji's interest in Yoga and disappeared to nowhere, just as he had appeared from nowhere. (In the future as Guruji matured in spirituality, he would realize that what happened during the few days of Bicchu's company was not mere exchange of knowledge. It was a Spiritual 'Initiation' done subtly by Bicchu upon him.) Over a period, Guruji gave up the hope of finding Bicchu. But, for most of the time, his mind would be occupied with the thoughts of Bicchu and the techniques he had demonstrated. At times he would suddenly wake up from deep sleep in the night and brood over his lost opportunity to learn Yoga from Bicchu. Knowing that he must now act rather than just lament on the past, he started off by trying out the control of stomach that Bicchu had shown him. Over a few weeks, he could do them to some extent (we now know that it is called the 'Nauli' technique). Like-wise he kept on attempting more of the techniques shown to him by Bicchu. Some he could do, some he couldn't. Overall, he was not happy with his progress, but was not sure how to make the next effort in Yoga. He kept on checking about Yoga with whoever he thought could help. In one such follow-up, someone informed him that a printing press in the North-Indian city of Aligadh publishes books on 'Yogasans'. Glad to see some light of hope, he accordingly wrote a letter to the publisher. After a few weeks, he got a call from the local post office to collect a parcel received from Aligadh. Very happy that his requested book on 'Yogasans' had arrived, he quickly collected the parcel and opened it. He was shocked to see the contents of the parcel. They were books on 'bhogasans' or Pornography!! Perspiring with embarrassment, he quickly took the books to the open space behind his house and burned them off! His first attempt to learn Yoga thus met with miserable failure. (In the later part of his life, Guruji once mentioned that had he not destroyed those books immediately, he would have been a very 'different' individual in life.)

In the mean time, Guruji's other social activities continued. A local newspaper called 'Dainik Samachar Patrika' dated 26th July 1943 honored Guruji with a report of an important contribution by him. The allied forces were in dire shortage of manpower and the British rulers of India had appealed Indians to join the armed forces. Gandhi had supported the British appeal and asked the Indians to set aside all the differences and join forces with the British. The recruitment drive took momentum over a few months all across India and reached the Raver township. The Collector's office pushed hard for this drive and appealed to the residents of Raver to join the army. To the dismay of the Collector, the response from the residents was very poor. Repeated efforts yielded no effect. Frustrated and unable to understand what is happening, the Collector's office summoned Guruji and requested him to use his influence to convince the residents of Raver. Guruji could have easily denied any help, but he knew that this drive was supported by his role-model, Gandhi. Hence, deciding to help the cause, he started investigating the matter. He was surprised to find that the failure of this drive was due to a

rumor spread by those opposing Gandhi's views. The illiterate residents were made to believe that they would be first recruited and later killed in a human-sacrifice ritual meant for easing the construction of a bridge! Guruji then talked to the residents and convinced them that this was not the case. He provided all the details of the attractive re-imbursements and conveyed to them the opportunities awaiting them in the armed forces. His initiative yielded success. At the end of the drive, Guruji managed to get 319 resident of Raver recruited in the Armed forces. Needless to say, the Collector conveyed his heartfelt thanks to Guruji.

One more incidence was to happen which would test Guruji's leadership and the unity of the residents of 'Raver' township. A disaster was to strike Raver which must be responded with blistering speed and seamless coordination. Readers may please allow me to reserve it for the next chapter.

27. Disaster strikes Raver.

In the earlier episode, it was mentioned that a disaster struck Raver and posed a great challenge to the residents.

A three storey building of a local primary school collapsed all of a sudden. The students had just finished the morning prayers and were about to start their studies when the poorly built structure came down, not leaving a single wall in-tact. As a rule, the speed of response to such disasters determines the number of casualties. In remote rural parts (as was the case of Raver), government rescue services are either unavailable or take a notoriously long time to arrive from the nearby cities. Under such circumstances, the rescue fully depends on the initiatives taken by the residents. Within moments from the disaster, Guruji triggered his team of youngsters. Joined later with more villagers, Guruji and his team worked ceaselessly at the site for the day and that night. Every kid trapped in the rubble was rescued. By God's grace there were no casualties. Residents of Raver demonstrated excellent solidarity under Guruji's leadership. If not for an established network of youngsters under his leadership, the response would have been much slower and casualties were inevitable on that doomed day. Although the casualties were avoided, Guruji realized that the images of children buried under the rubble had left a long lasting psychological impact on the residents. For the weeks and months to come Guruji counselled several residents for what we now know as the 'Post Trauma Symptom' that tortures the victims for years if left un-attended.

Readers may remember that Part-21 discussed about one of Guruji's dutiful and courageous boss, Fauzdar Marathe who was falsely implicated for torture of women and children and kept under arrest. (He was kept in arrest in the jail of 'Akola' district). The political trap laid down by the mafia of Rasalpur resulted in his suspension from job and a dire financial difficulty to his family. Since then, Guruji had been in constant touch with Mr. Marathe's family, giving them moral support and keeping up their spirits. Guruji also appealed to the residents of Raver and took initiative to raise a fund for the family of Mr. Marathe. The family was touched by this gesture , especially since they had been almost abandoned by their own relatives.

The underworld of Raver and Rasalpur was not going to stop by ruining Fauzdar Marathe and leave Guruji in peace. After several failed attempts to implicate Guruji in some kind of scandal, they started efforts to get him transferred out of the region. Soon, their efforts and political connections delivered results. Guruji was ordered to be transferred to another place. This was the dreaded township of 'Chopda' – a place so lawless that the policemen working there were in a constant lookout for opportunities to get transferred out. Learning of this development, several of Guruji's well-wishers offered to help him stop the transfer through their network among the higher ranks in the police. Experienced police officers advised Guruji not to go to

Chopda for the sake of his and his family's safety. Youngsters and other residents of Raver too were greatly saddened that their beloved 'Mama' would no longer be with them. Everyone insisted that Guruji should not leave Raver and were willing to do whatever they can to somehow stop him from going away.

Will Guruji stay in Raver or will he move to Chopda? Will Guruji's friends and well-wishers be able to stop his transfer? Please watch out the next episode to get these answers.

28. Chopda

In Part-27, we learned that the mafia of Raver flexed its political muscles to get Guruji transferred out to the dangerously lawless town of 'Chopda'. The town had a dubious distinction of being one among the places with highest crime rates in the State of Maharashtra. The armed gangs here were almost like army battalions. Guruji's well wishers urged him not to shift to Chopda even if it meant the loss of his job. To the leaders and youngsters of Raver, Guruji's departure meant a major loss since every social activity revolved around Guruji's charisma. Some of the residents who had political influence also started efforts to stop his posting to Chopda. But surprisingly, Guruji stopped them from doing so. He explained to them that change is a rule of nature. Besides, postings from place to place was not an uncommon practice in the Indian Police. If the posting does not happen today, it is bound to happen at another time. Explaining this, he bid a farewell to Raver with tears of gratitude in his eyes.

Guruji started assessing the situation in Chopda from day-one of his posting there. Although crime ridden, Chopda had some good leaders in the right place. Chopda's MLA by the name Madhav Patil and its treasurer by the name Maganlal-Sheth Potdar were actively trying to curb the crime, although with little success. The 'Police Fauzdar' also was an efficient Police Officer working closely with his team. As Guruji further studied the situation, he found that one of the bottlenecks in curbing the crime lied in the lack of official complaints against the criminals from the residents. Without official complaints, the Police were handicapped and any strong action was impossible. The gangsters had terrorized the residents to such an extent that no one dared lodge a complaint. Understanding this, Guruji set into action. He started actively communicating with the residents of Chopda. He proposed the residents that rather than filing a complaint individually, they should form groups and collectively sign the complaints. That way, the gangsters will not be able to single out any individual for revenge. This idea appealed to the residents. Hundreds of Policemen worked in Chopda but no one had thought of this before. Complaints against the gangsters started streaming in. This greatly eased the job of Guruji's bosses to launch 'Chapter Cases' against the gangsters. This ability to thoroughly investigate, go to the root of the problem and take appropriate actions was Guruji's striking characteristic. It should also be noted that it was not in his official job-scope to motivate the residents to launch complaints. Yet he did it with his passion towards his job.

Nurturing a good passion for ourselves is always great, but spreading that passion to our fellow beings brings even greater fulfillment. In parallel to his official duties, Guruji started looking for opportunities of his passions towards gymnasiums and the 'Powada' vocal art. Guruji searched and found some residents who were passionate towards the 'Powada' vocal art. They formed a troupe and started conducting their shows in the open grounds of schools in Chopda. Their

'Powada' songs dedicated towards heroes and martyrs for the right causes became extremely popular among the residents.

The residents of Chopda were running a gymnasium. But it was not as functional as it should be. It presented several opportunities for improvement. Guruji joined this gymnasium and shared his gymnastic arts with the youngsters there. Within no time Guruji became an icon among them. In a few months the gymnasium was buzzing with activities. The energy was so much that it attracted several policemen and numerous youngsters to join the gym. The word of Guruji's activity started spreading among the residents. A few more weeks and the gym could not accommodate the members! To cater for more members, Guruji started planning for one more new gymnasium. Together with some like minded residents, Guruji founded a new gym called 'Jai-Hind Vyayam Shala' [*Jai-Hind=Victory to India; Vyayam=exercise; Shala=School*]

This 'Jai-Hind' gymnasium would steal a page in the history of Chopda and also in Guruji's life. That shall be detailed in the next episode.

29. The 'Jai-Hind' Gymnasium

In the earlier episode, we saw that Guruji was posted to the lawless town of 'Chopda'. In spite of knowing the risks in working at the Police force at Chopda, Guruji took the challenge. He knew that 'change' is the watchword of nature and resisting change means resisting one's own growth. After settling down in Chopda, he refused to limit his activities only to his family and his job. Though there were hardly any residents whom he knew here, with his usual energy, he got involved in the social activities. With his excellent leadership, he turned around a dysfunctional gym to the extent that it was eventually overwhelmed with the enrollment of youngsters. To cater for the growing crowd, he embarked upon a project to start a new gym. This was the 'Jai-Hind' gym as described earlier.

To organize the infrastructure and activities of the Jai-hind gym, Guruji networked intensely with the locals. Knowing about his dedication to the earlier gym and how he had turned it around, the residents offered him all the support needed. Establishing this gym demanded his attention and efforts for the days and nights to come. He did not spare any efforts and the outcome was a well equipped and full fledged gym which the residents and youngsters of Chopda adored.

At the Jai-Hind gym, Guruji trained the young boys of Chopda into wrestling and other martial arts with great dedication. Many of the young boys came from poor families but had the passion to learn. The food they consumed was hardly nutritious and it was impossible that they could excel with that poor diet. But so much was Guruji's initiative that he approached the affluent traders of the local 'Marwadi' community. Through their charity, he arranged a regular supply of milk and other nutritious food for the poor boys. He made them to compete with wrestlers from nearby villages and towns. Over a period, the wrestlers trained by Guruji brought several victories and medals. Many of his wrestlers became renowned in the region bringing honour and fame to Chopda which was all the while only infamous for its crime and lawlessness.

The Jai-Hind gym was not only a place for physical training. The fame of the gym attracted several boys from criminal background. With these boys, Guruji had to take up the role of a counsellor too. Over a period, with his constant counselling and guidance several of those boys changed their paths in life to become better citizens. These boys had so much trust upon Guruji that they volunteered vital clues and critical informations about the happenings in the underworld to Guruji. Now, cracking down upon the criminal gangs became much more easier for the Police through them. This was where the happy and harmonious Jai-Hind gym crossed

roads (and eventually swords) with the underworld of Chopda. This brought Guruji face to face with one of the deadliest dons of the Chopda underworld - Nabu Pehelwan!!

30. 'Tussle with Nabu'

Part-29- It was described how Guruji established and operated the 'Jai-Hind Gymnasium in Chopda. He was the founder, operator, trainer and also the counselor for the Gym. It was also mentioned that some boys with a criminal background attended this gym and put their trust in Guruji to provide vital clues about the underworld.

In one such tip-off Guruji raided a location to rescue a young girl from the clutches of a don called 'Nabu Pehelwan'. (The girl happened to be the sister of a well known person from Mumbai). This was Guruji's first encounter with Nabu who was widely infamous for his crooked character and criminal activities. Extremely cruel and untrustworthy, this Nabu had a strong lust for women. He had forced several women into prostitution with his muscle power. He must have had a good political 'acumen' too. For, working hand-in-hand with the Hindu criminal gangs, he had carefully created a rift between the Hindu and the minority communities of Chopda. He didn't miss a single opportunity to instigate riots between the two communities at any smallest incident. Every such opportunity was useful to project himself as the savior and leader of the local minority community. At the first encounter with Nabu, Guruji couldn't gather enough evidence against him. But he had vowed to put him behind the bars one day. This was something which non of his Police friends supported due to the power and clout of Nabu. But Guruji's determination and sense of responsibility were far stronger. He put in all the efforts to gather evidences and file a 'Chapter case' against Nabu to get him arrested. The whole department ridiculed at Guruji. Ever surrounded by armed bodyguards, attempting to arrest Nabu was like inviting death. But Guruji's confidence was unshaken. His inner voice told him that he will be successful in arresting Nabu. Finally the arrest warrant was received. Guruji's 'alert' boss had taken a leave and disappeared from Chopda the earlier day itself. The responsibility to arrest Nabu fell upon Guruji's shoulders. All his colleagues had already turned their backs upon him. Not knowing what would happen next, Guruji set alone to arrest Nabu! But God sent his own force to protect his lone soldier!! As Guruji arrived at the Chopda 'ST stand' (Bus interchange), some boys from the 'Jai-Hind' gym spotted Guruji.

"Mama, what brings you here?"

"I am going to arrest Nabu. There's an arrest warrant." Said Guruji.

The boys quickly smelled the danger ahead. They knew it was useless to attempt to stop Guruji. They asked Guruji to wait for a few more minutes. Within no time a large group of the Jai-Hind gym boys, fully armed, gathered around Guruji. Chagan Kasar and Baburao Chaudhari covered Guruji from the front and the whole group arrived at Nabu's den. So much was the love of the

gym boys towards Guruji that they were willing to lay down their lives for him. What had Guruji given them? Nothing but love.

Nabu was seated like a King, surrounded by about fifty of his gang men.

“Welcome Mama. You want to arrest me?” Nabu smiled and asked Guruji. He had already received the news of his arrest warrant.

“Yes Nabu. I have an arrest warrant. It’s best you don’t resist the arrest and follow me. “ Guruji replied.

Nabu thought for a while. Guruji was in Police uniform. Attacking him now would have serious implications. The boys around Guruji were the finest wrestlers and armed martial arts experts in the region. Any resistance would mean sever bloodshed and a humiliating defeat that can bring down the moral of his gang.

“Okay Mama. I will follow you. But no hand-cuffs.” Nabu negotiated.

Guruji agreed. The group brought Nabu to the police station. A huge crowd had gathered and followed Guruji and his group to the Police station. Guruji put Nabu behind the bars for interrogation.

Guruji knew that Nabu would be bailed out by the local politicians. In the next two days, the interrogators extracted whatever information that they can from Nabu. On the third day, the leaders of a political party bailed Nabu out.

Nabu’s arrest, although short lived, brought several positive effects. It sent a signal to the underworld that if a fierce don like Nabu can be arrested, no one was beyond the reach of the law. The arrest boosted the moral of the Police force. It brought great respect to Guruji from the residents as well as the Police force. The bonding between the boys of the ‘Jai-Hind Gym’ grew stronger than ever.

31. Growing with the challenges.

The lyrics of a popular song in the 'Marathi' language spoken by Guruji goes as follows – '....Strokes of the hammer...strokes of the chiseltransform the rock into an idol....'. Every challenge in life is also an opportunity to grow. It is worth to review some challenges and life-threatening occasions that Guruji had to go through. One such incident was the grand chariot procession that took place in the town of Chopda on 17th October 1945.

A crowd numbering thousands gathered yearly for this chariot procession. The centre of this procession used to be a beautifully decorated chariot, drums called 'tasha', a procession dance called 'lezim' etc. This year, the job of managing the security was assigned to Guruji. Nabu, whom Guruji had challenged had been looking for an opportunity to revenge the insult he had gone through. Informers to the Police and other contacts of Guruji had cautioned Guruji that an elaborate plan to murder him was laid down. Once again, Guruji paid no heed to the threats upon his life. The call of duty was much more important to him than the fear for losing life. While his well wishers were pleading to him not to join the security, interestingly, his mother strongly supported him to deliver his duties. She didn't speak a single word, but quietly sat down and sharpened a sword on the night before the procession and handed it over to Guruji! (It is another matter that Guruji did not use that sword since his students from the gym again surrounded him throughout the procession and protected him!). By grace of God, no one could harm Guruji and the procession went well without any violence.

In another occasion, Guruji, his two bosses and a team of policemen raided the home of a bandit by the name 'Dhanji' in a nearby village called 'Nandure'. After the raid and successful arrest of Dhanji, the police team was given a treat by the village heads. But the celebration went a bit 'excess'. At the end of the celebration at night, only two individuals were fully in their senses – Guruji who did not drink and the arrested bandit who was obviously not offered a drink. The rest of the team was either fully drunk and knocked out or only in partial senses! In the drunk state, at around mid-night, Guruji's bosses ordered the whole group to get into two horse carts and return back to the Chopda police station. Guruji had to drive the first horse cart with two of his fully drunk bosses and arrested bandit Dhanji. The second cart behind Guruji's cart carried the load of cash recovered during the raid. The cash was 'guarded' by the rest of the team who was hardly in senses. Guruji was driving the cart through the pitch dark forest between the 'Nandure' village and Chopda town. A group of about fifteen dacoits armed with spears challenged Guruji. By the time the dacoits approached closer to the cart, Guruji had to decide his strategy. He negotiated with the arrested Dhanji and promised him that he will help him in every way throughout his arrest. When Dhanji agreed, Guruji removed his handcuffs and the two were ready to face the attackers! Guruji gave the dacoits an impression that his two bosses inside the cart and the rest of the police team was armed with rifles and will shoot down

anyone who resisted an arrest. Believing Guruji's words, most of them laid down the weapons. But there were few who attacked Guruji and Dhanji. Using his metal whip called 'hunter', he fought them, disarmed them and arrested them too.

Challenges in our work ultimately help us to emerge as a more confident and a mature individual. There is no work without challenges. It is up to the individual to take those challenges and eventually grow with them or to run away from them. Guruji's profession as a policeman offered challenges that helped him emerge as a determined, decisive, courageous and an honest individual.

32. The Sphere of Influence

As the hectic life in Chopda carried on, Guruji wife delivered her second son who was later to be named as 'Devidas'.

The profession of a Policeman, the administration of the gyms and involvement in social activities was hardly leaving any time for Guruji to enjoy the sweet moments of a family life. However, Guruji was aware that without this sacrifice any constructive social work was not possible. Throughout his life, one observes that Guruji's successfully carried out all the responsibilities that the building of his family needed. But when it came to the enjoyments of the family life such as celebrations, get-togethers of relatives etc, Guruji's priority was always his work. Holidays with family or relatives were almost un-heard of. In that sense it will be very difficult to fit Guruji in the image of a 'family man'.

But it should not be thought even for a moment that this sacrifice of Guruji was of no use for his family or caused any adverse effect on the family. In fact this lifestyle of high work standards set an example for his sons, daughters and even the grandsons and grand daughters. As each one of them grew up, they took inspiration from Guruji's skills and work and tried sincerely to imitate Guruji within their capacity. In this effort, Guruji's Sons, Grandsons, Daughters and grand-daughters attained amazing physical skills that the writer has yet to see anyone demonstrating.

It should also be noted that Guruji's sphere of influence was not limited to the family, but rather expanded to everyone who came in contact with him. The boys in Chopda who were associated with him came from the lowest strata of the society. They had no guidance as to how to lead a good life. Guruji filled in this vacuum. To those boys, he was the role model to follow and take directions from. Deriving inspiration from Guruji, several of them – Govind Potdar, Srikrishna Tillu, Gopal Yadnik, Sitaram Nikam, Babu Cahudhary, Arjun Sonavne - settled well in life and established themselves as experts in their individual fields.

With industry and leadership came success to all the endeavors that Guruji took up. Yet, Bicchu's memories and the yearning for Yoga made him restless. Utilizing every small opportunity to learn anything Yogic that comes along the way, he was trying to inch forward. But the success was very limited. It had been years after the meeting with Bicchu and hardly any Yogic techniques were 'taught' by Bicchu to Guruji. In normal circumstances an individual would have forgotten that meeting with Bicchu and what was discussed therein. But in Guruji's case, the yearning for Yoga was becoming stronger and stronger as the days passed on. A guilt was building up that he is unable to walk on the path laid down by his Guru. In Chopda, Guruji acquired a few Yogic techniques and shared them with his students.

33. Posting to Ammalner

Chapters 28 to 32 have recorded Guruji's stay and work in the 'Chopda' town and the surrounding villages. His stay in Chopda can be traced to a period between 1943 to 1948 when his second son Devidas was born. The growing family demanded more expenses. Though Guruji himself never worried too much about it, it seems that God always provided whatever was required for the small needs of his beloved soldier. In January 1949, Guruji was promoted due to his hard-work and honesty. This promotion required a migration to another nearby district called 'Ammalner'. Accordingly, Guruji moved to 'Ammalner' and rented a house there. The Ammalner township itself was peaceful, but the surrounding villages were notoriously crime ridden. The law and order of four such villages were assigned to Guruji. These were 'Vavde', 'Javkhede', 'Mandal' and 'Mudi'. Located along the banks of 'Tapi' and 'Panjra' rivers, these villages were largely populated by fishermen communities called 'Koli'. Among the above four villages, 'Vavde' village was the birthplace of Guruji's wife and the residence of Guruji's in-laws.

As he settled down in his job here, Guruji observed that Ammalner had several old gyms lying dysfunctional for years. Once again Guruji gathered the youth in Ammalner and re-vitalized several gyms with his usual leadership and zest. Within no time, he won great friends in Ammalner. Those who go through migrations demanded by their jobs know how difficult it is to settle down in an unknown land even with today's advanced social networking facilities. A lesson we learn from Guruji's successful migrations is that it is not difficult to win the love and friendship of any society if one is selflessly giving to that society. The beauty of selfless giving is that one attracts only selfless and kind-hearted friends.

A peculiar law and order situation awaited Guruji at the 'Mandal' village. A loan shark who was now a wealthy and powerful landlord was draining the wealth and property of the illiterate farmers and fishermen using his cunning tactics. Providing the farmers with small amounts of loans, he was getting their thumb-prints on documents which they could neither read nor understand. This was 'Jethmal Sheth'. To run this mode of operation, Jethmal had built his own force of paid gangsters – youngsters from the very same communities from whom he was laundering the wealth. Using these gangsters, he made sure that everything illegal in his operation would be carried out by others while he himself remained clean.

The unsettling stories of the villagers moved Guruji. His conscience wouldn't allow him to just sit and watch. Setting into action to tackle this situation, Guruji worked on two fronts. First, he followed a rigorous social awakening campaign in the village with his troupe conducting cultural activities. Contents of his frequent cultural shows exposed the wrong doings of Jethmal and cautioned the villagers of the dire consequences that would arise if they took any financial support from this loan shark. Secondly, he campaigned among the villagers and made them

aware that they still can get their lands back although they had signed off the documents. He urged them to file reports against Jethmal. This, he did relentlessly until numerous charge-sheets were successfully filed against Jethmal.

The irate Jethmal and his cronies issued several threats to Guruji, but to no avail. Finally an arrest warrant was issued against Jethmal. Guruji and his colleagues went until Jethmal's doorsteps to arrest him, only to find out that Jethmal was already informed and he had already moved his lawyers to stop the arrest. But so determined was Guruji, that he managed to get yet another arrest warrant issued in a few week's time. This time, there was no legal escape route for Jethmal. But Jethmal gathered so much force of his gangsters around him that Guruji had to arrange special force from the Jalgaon Police head-quarters to get the crook arrested.

With this arrest and the social awakening created by Guruji, several villagers got their lands back and many were saved. The 'Police-Patil' and other village heads of 'Mandal' village provided Guruji un-precedent support to carry out the operation. So touched were the villagers that they offered Guruji a piece of their most fertile land – a small token of their love and appreciation. In his characteristic mannerism and humility, Guruji gently refused the reward saying that what he had done was just his duty. The writer of Guruji's biography visited Mandal to verify the above facts. He was pleasantly surprised to find that the villagers were full of praise towards Guruji although fifty years had passed on after the incidence.

34. Early Yogic Healings

In Chapter 32 We observed that Gururji had made little progress in the exploration of Yoga during his stay in Chopda. After his posting to the town of 'Ammalner' too, his experiments in Yoga continued. Wrestling, martial arts and the gym activities were ongoing, but were mostly due to the past momentum of those activities. Underneath the current of those activities, the seed of Yoga that Bicchu had sown, was slowly sprouting in the form of his constant yearning for Yoga. At times from books and magazines, at times from friends and acquaintances, Gururji was learning one technique at a time and carefully working upon it like a gem-cutter would polish a diamond. After mastering it, he would then share it with his friends. One can easily imagine Gururji's perseverance, especially since he was training himself without any guidance from experts.

During these early years of his stay in Ammalner, Gururji must have acquired the mastery over a considerable number of Yogic techniques. I draw this inference because the first few cases of his Yogic healing could be traced to the residents of Ammalner. One of those cases which is worth mentioning here is that of a farmer by the name 'Bajirao Patil'. Bajirao hailed from the village of 'Vavde' which was also the residence of Gururji's in-laws. This fit, young and hard-working Bajirao suddenly fell sick and the local doctor referred him to specialists in Bombay. The diagnosis revealed that one of his kidneys had failed. The further treatment would cost Bajirao around Twenty Thousand Indian Rupees. This was a huge amount in those days and Bajirao had to sell off most of his land to raise that amount. The treatment started off in Bombay but hardly any improvement could be seen in Bajirao's health. Finally the doctors gave up. The saddened Bajirao returned home from Mumbai without any hopes to stay alive. After understanding his situation, Gururji encouraged him to try the Yogic cleansing techniques and Postures. But Bajirao's weak and ailing body meant that he needed a very close attention and nursing. Gururji and his family insisted that Bajirao should stay with them until he is fully cured.

One cannot but immediately appreciate the goodness and generosity of Gururji and his family here. As volunteers teaching Yoga, we already know the risks involved in handling candidates with ailments. Bringing home a patient with such a serious condition requires great courage as well as love. Gururji and his family has demonstrated such courage and love in multiple cases including the current case of Mr. Bajirao. Accordingly Bajirao stayed with Gururji's family. He was carefully treated with the Yogic 'Shodhan-Karmas' (cleansing techniques) and Asans. In addition, specific herbal medication was administered under the close supervision of Gururji. This treatment went on for a month's time at Gururji's home and to the awe of everyone, Bajirao was fully cured !! A few weeks later, Bajirao even participated in some of the

demonstrations of physical strength conducted by Guruji's Gyms. He had narrowly escaped death. What the costly medical treatment could not achieve, Guruji's Hathayoga had achieved. Bajirao proudly announced that Guruji had given him a second life. This method of healing – a combination of herbal medicine and Hathayoga was followed and refined by Guruji through-out his life. (Decades later, in the late 80's, I met up with Bajirao when he visited Guruji's place in my hometown of Thane and Bajirao himself narrated his journey into Yoga and his escape from death.)

35. From 'Vavde' to Mumbai

In Part-34 we read how Guruji and his family helped to heal Mr. Bajirao Patil, who had lost one of his kidneys. Guruji had earned immense love and blessings of the residents of Ammalner due to the selfless acts. This was evident during our visit to the village of 'Vavde' when we saw hundreds of villagers gathered at the village entrance of to welcome Guruji. Writes the biographer : “..... my visit to the village of Vavde for the purpose of the research of the biography, together with Guruji ,was an amazing experience. (After reaching 'Vavde') We were taken to a large community hall. The open ground in front of the hall was nicely decorated to welcome Guruji. Several pictures of Gods, Goddesses and saints adorned the walls of the hall, for prayers, among those pictures was Guruji's picture too. Every villager coming into the hall touched Guruji's feet and prostrated in front of him. At around 4 PM, we were taken around the village to visit the homes of several villagers. A large crowd followed us walking respectfully behind Guruji. Conch shells were blown as we approached every house to announce Guruji's arrival. After offering Guruji a wooden seat, the men and women of the house greeted him in a traditional way by orbiting an oil lamp around his face and applying red vermilion on his forehead. The family would then prostrate in front of Guruji and take his blessings. This went on from one house to another until sunset but Guruji tirelessly visited all with a smiling face. After this, Guruji was requested to give a discourse to the villagers. A crowd of over two hundred men, women and children waited eagerly to listen to Guruji. In between, there was a disruption in the electricity and the lights and the sound system was off. Yet Guruji spoke in his usual strong voice in fluent local 'Ahirani' dialect for an hour. The mass listened to Guruji in pin-drop silence.....”

We notice that the above respect was showered upon Guruji by the villagers although Guruji was visiting the village after decades. This test of time is a true test of the popularity of a leader and is a reliable pointer to the extent to which a leader has touched the lives and left indelible impressions. It also speaks volumes of the character of the leader. Ironically, Guruji never saw himself as a 'leader' of the masses. In fact he was always proud of his identity as a 'Servant' (or 'Sevak' in his native Marathi language) of the masses.

In parallel to the social work that he had taken upon himself, Guruji was careful not to defocus from his official duties. In fact he topped a 'disguise show' in which policemen from 28 different districts competed. This achievement and his reputation as an honest and hardworking staff brought him a promotion again in 1949. With this promotion, he was required to migrate to the Mumbai city. Being the Industrial capital of India, Mumbai was the dream city of every young Indian to migrate to. It would be here that Guruji's social activities would be shaped further. It

would be in Mumbai that his work and popularity as a Hathayogi would reach it's peak. Subsequent chapters would cover that.

36. Kamathipura Lane number-7

It was mentioned in the last chapter that Guruji was promoted and that this promotion required him to move to the city of Mumbai. This was in year 1949 when India had received independence two years ago. The posting to Mumbai also involved Guruji's transfer to Mumbai Police's famous 'CID' department. This wing of the Indian Police is primarily an Intelligence function and involved several secret operations. Together with other staff, for a year's period, Guruji was provided residence opposite the 'Jinnah Hall' in Mumbai. His work primarily involved close monitoring and recording of the media activities, which in those days was primarily involving the quality and content of Newspaper reports. Knowing if there was any abuse of 'freedom of expression' must have been important for the Government, especially during the early days of independence. Aside from this surveillance, Guruji was also assigned the responsibility of reviewing and proposing rental residences to the 'Accommodation Department'. This job gave Guruji ample opportunity to travel all over the Mumbai city and acquainted him with every lane of the city.

After around a year's time, sometime in the 1950, it was announced that a total of sixty staff of the CID will be provided with a new accommodation, Guruji being one among them. The news sent a wave of excitement among the staff. But the reality unfolded a bit later. The new accommodation would be in a location called 'Kamathipura', the epicenter of Mumbai's crime in those days. Infamous of being Asia's second largest red-light district, the Kamathipura hosted prostitutes trafficked from all across India, Nepal and Europe. (Readers may refer to Wikipedia to know more about this 'Kamathipura'). Worst still, the CID staff was provided with the accommodation after evacuating a block that was originally occupied by prostitutes. The migrant CID staff was given no other option and had to move to the new accommodation with their families. The block was called 'Lambi-Chal' or the 'long-block' due to its layout. The initial days of their stay were truly troublesome. The customers of the prostitutes who originally worked in that block were not aware of the new occupants. At odd hours, the drunk customers would knock the doors of the new occupants, only to find a family staying there. The matter would then be resolved either by a peaceful discussion, or by an argument or by a thrashing from the seasoned hands (and occasionally legs) of the CID staff!!

Whatever be the prevailing conditions, a truly passionate person continues to pursue his or her passion relentless. In the above surroundings of Kamathipura, Guruji started searching around for a gym that would feed his passion for exercise. Within a few days, he found one gym in a nearby lane. A few boys exercising, their 'Ustad' or teacher and a few equipment.... the gym was more like a shanty warehouse. For the next few weeks Guruji regularly visited the gym, little knowing that this very place would be the foundation for his future activities in Mumbai.

A few incidents which happened in the subsequent days created significant respect towards Guruji among the participants of the gym. One day Guruji expressed his opinion about the gym to the boys and their teacher. He explained that a gym should not be merely a place to build the body. It should have a component of worship. Taking care of the physical body was like taking care of a temple in which the Self resides. He also expressed the need of an idol of 'Hanuman' in the temple ('Hanuman' is the Hindu deity that represents good character, strength and valor.). This concept was something very new to them. But they liked it and everyone agreed. As days passed, the boys in the gym came to know that Guruji is a staff of the CID wing due to which they started looking up to Guruji. On one occasion, a boy from the gym visited Guruji's house and saw the pictures of Guruji's demonstrations, his medals and pictures of Guruji being honored on different occasions. The boy shared this with everyone in the gym saying that Guruji was no 'ordinary' individual. Guruji also started sharing his skills with the boys and everyone knew that there is a lot more for them to learn from him. All this created significant respect towards Guruji among the boys in the gym and they took up Guruji as their guide and leader.

But bringing that shanty gym to the next level and inspiring the boys for social work was no ordinary task. The Kamathipura surroundings with its prostitution, bars, gambling dens etc were anything but conducive for a good activity to flourish. The residents were severely impoverished surviving hand to mouth by rolling cheap cigars called 'beedis'. Boggled down to meet their ends, they hardly knew anything about community spirit etc. that they would teach their young kids. But Guruji did not hold his efforts due to these difficulties. Here is a lesson for we all volunteers. Our initiative should not end if the conducive environment is not available. In fact, most often, voluntary work is most needed where the conditions are unfavorable. How Guruji moved forward from here will be learning journey for us.

37. Doctor Vitthal Naik

Readers, please allow me to dedicate this chapter to a life-long assistant to Guruji . This person was so closely associated to Guruji that Guruji's biography cannot be complete without writing about him. The fact that he accompanied Guruji each and every evening (and frequently mornings too) for the last fifty years of Guruji's life is enough to understand the association between the two of them.

During Guruji's early days of the stay at Kamathipura, one day a young boy wearing khaki shorts approached Guruji.

"I am not feeling well. Please give me some medicine." Guruji checked him and found that he had fever. He had running nose and was sneezing frequently.

"How do you know that I give medicines?" asked Guruji.

"The whole lane knows that you give free medicines. I don't have any money and need medicine. So I have come to you." The boy said without hiding any facts.

Guruji gave him some herbal powders to be mixed with honey and some herbs to make herbal tea. The boy went back, followed Guruji's instructions and recovered. From that day, until the end of his life, the boy kept Guruji's company like a shadow assisting Guruji in every way he could. His name was Vitthal Naik. After few more years, Guruji advised him to take up a Diploma in herbal medicine which he did. From then onwards, he was addressed as 'Dr. Naik' or just 'Doctor'. For years to come, Guruji dedicated his life for selfless propagation of Yoga and healing the needy through Yoga and herbal medicine. Guruji had an awesome energy, working each and every evening to remove the sufferings of those ailing with diseases. This he would do for the next 50 years under the banner of 'Ambika Yoga Kutir' or popularly called just 'Kutir'. There was only one individual in Kutir who matched that amazing energy of Guruji. That was Dr. Naik. Ever present with Guruji, Dr. Naik single handedly managed Kutir's wing of herbal medicine. Ever cheerful, full of humor and with a contagious smile on his face that made everyone else smile, Dr. Naik was the most beloved by Guruji's volunteers. Dark, short, well built and speaking with a slight stammer, he had something comical in his personality which made even the most serious person joke with him. Guruji loved him like his own son and had some expectations from him. Guruji wanted him to be orderly and meticulous in his work, but he was entirely messy. Guruji wanted him to be well-dressed. But he was always found in crumpled trousers and shirts, often the shirt being half tugged in the trousers and half hanging out. Guruji wanted him to talk formally and with great mannerism. But he was always in-formal and joking even with vey highly-placed people who visited Guruji. All this handicaps of Doctor Naik invited a lot of scolding from Guruji. Yet, the mutual understanding between Guruji and

Doctor Naik was so seamless that they often communicated with quick gestures, signs and code-words in the busy Yoga classes.

Doctor Naik knew his own handicaps but that did not affect even a bit of his dedication and passion for his work. He was ever running around procuring herbs from the shops and forests, preparing the medications in the most traditional ways, packing them and providing consultation to the ailing. Occasionally he had to travel to the residences of seriously ailing people delivering them the medicines, massaging them and communicating Guruji's messages to them. In addition, he was ever present in the evenings when people consulted Guruji for their ailments. Over the years, his contributions to Kutir grew so much that it was impossible to imagine running Kutir's herbal medicine section without Doctor Naik.

I always wondered how Doctor Naik balanced his family life, work and Kutir and once asked him so. The answer came swiftly ... "Atul, I don't balance at all. I just focus on service to Guruji and everything falls in place. Look, my son has a very good job, my daughter is married to a very good person, me and my wife are in good health. What else do I need?" Doctor Naik's single minded dedication to Guruji meant that he was totally detached from everything else in life. A quality that is rare to be found even among Yogis. Doctor Naik truly lived his simple philosophy of serving his Guru. He was a living example of a simple man delivering amazing results with his Herculine efforts.

We learn from him that being perfect is not a pre-requisite for excellent delivery, but dedication and hard work is.

38. Karma at Kamathipura

Chapter 36 had described how, in 1950, Guruji and his colleagues were allocated a residence in Mumbai's red-light district of Kamathipura and how Guruji engaged with a run-down gym in the vicinity of his residence.

Here, Guruji started training the boys in exercises and Yoga. Soon, the word spread that there was a very good instructor in the gym with great passion to train his students. Young boys in the vicinity started trickling into the gym. Guruji's mastery over the Malkhamb (Pole gymnastics), double-bar, wrestling, Suryanamaskars etc inspired this group of youngsters. Within no time, the gym (by the name 'Sarvoday' Gym) was buzzing with activity. The space was now insufficient to accommodate so many wrestlers. Some of the boys approached a local leader by the name Dr. Naravne and requested for permission to use the nearby open space for the Gym activities. Accordingly Dr. Naravne acquired the green-light from the authorities resulting in the first expansion of the Sarvoday Gym. Within no time, the membership of the once dysfunctional and idle Gym crossed 100. Guruji's inspirational talks together with his skillful training brought out the best among the boys.

But Guruji's work was not limited to the Sarvoday Gym alone. In early morning hours, Guruji would gather young kids and teenagers and make them perform disciplined parades in the playground of a nearby school. Such activities brought about excellent bonding and team work among the residents. On the independence day of India, Lane-7 of Kamathipura would get flooded by crowds to see the demonstrations, parades and performances of the youngsters trained by Guruji. The lane once condemned for its brothels and crime started getting some respect in the society. Guruji also provided free herbal medicines to anyone who approached him. His effective and free medication was a great help for the residents ridden with poverty. Falling sick meant a loss of critical income for them since they worked on daily wages doing menial tasks.

Guruji's work in Lane-7 of Kamathipura was an exemplary social transformation brought about by sincere efforts and team work. The improvements that Guruji brought about in this region just in a span of two years (1950 to 1952) were so well received that it attracted praise from then Chief Minister, Morarji Desai. (Morarji Desai was to eventually become the Prime Minister of India). In an event organized by the residents of Kamathipura, Mr. Morarji Desai was the Guest Of Honor. On this occasion, Guruji's student, Bhalchandra Nalla, astounded the Minister with his feats of strength such as Driving a car over his chest, placing a stone over the chest and crushing it with hammer etc. The speeches delivered by the residents too were full of praise for Guruji's leadership, his free herbal medication to the poor etc. The impressed Chief Minister Morarji Desai said "I can see manifestation of God in your Nikam Guruji. Serving the

downtrodden and the ailing is true religion. It is this true religion that is being practiced here. It brings me great satisfaction”

39. Salute to the Sun, Salute to the Teacher

Readers may remember that Chapter-9 mentioned about a monk by the name 'Masurekar Maharaj' who was propagating the art of SuryaNamaskars across the 'Maharashtra' state of India. Around 1926-1927, young Guruji was initiated by this Masurekar Maharaj into SuryaNamaskars. The Ashram of Masurekar Maharaj was in Mumbai and now, in 1951~52, Guruji too was posted into Mumbai CID. One day, from his Ashram at 'Goregaon' of Mumbai, Masurekar Maharaj announced that anyone who finishes 1200 Suryanamaskars (Yes. One thousand and two hundred!) SuryaNamaskars in 2 hours will be presented with a copy of the 'Das-bodh' text which is one among the most revered ancient texts in the state of Maharashtra. Thousands of youngsters responded to this call of Masurekar Maharaj. Guruji too responded to this call by organizing a Suryanamaskar competition in his 'Sarvoday Gym' of Kamathipura. Guruji vowed that he and his followers at the Gym will not only attempt to finish 1200 SuryaNamakars in 2 hours, but will also collectively complete 1.2 million Suryanamaskars !! This would be Guruji's offerings at the feet of his teacher as a capable disciple.

It can easily be calculated that one must consistently complete a SuryaNamaskar within six seconds to achieve a rate of 1200 SuryaNamaskars within two hours. Very able bodied youngsters trained under the watchful eyes of Guruji were chosen for this feat. To accomplish the vow of 1.2 million collective SuryaNamaskars, the team needed to train and enroll as many participants as possible. Setting into action in full force, Guruji and his team started the enrollment drive and training the candidates. Kids, youngsters, women, elderly, everyone was encouraged. Guruji's wife and his family too participated. The competition and Guruji's vow to complete 1.2 million SuryaNamaskars was just a reason, the true intention being spreading the art of SuryaNamaskars. Hundreds of candidates were introduced to SuryaNamaskars in this program. So inclusive was Guruji's approach that even some of the prostitutes of Kamathipura were trained and encouraged to participate in the Competition. As the competition progressed, the floor of Guruji's Sarvoday Gym was wetted by the sweat of the candidates and had to be mopped dry repeatedly. At the end of the competition eleven of Guruji's students completed 1200 suryanamaskars in 2 hours! Guruji's vow of 1.2 collective SuryaNamaskars too was accomplished. Masurekar Maharaj sent three of his monks to honor the event and present the prizes.

Today, as we practice the SuryaNamaskars and derive it's benefits, activists like Masurekar Maharaj and his followers like Guruji who revived the forgotten art of SuryaNamaskars by various innovative programs must be thanked for their efforts.

Aside from the programs as mentioned above and other activities like running the gym, providing free medication etc, at times Guruji had to do some unpleasant work too. Being a

householder he was particular to remain away from the lanes of Kamathipura where brothels operated for days and nights. Yet, the word had spread even in those lanes about Guruji's Gym and his good work. Women working in those brothels at times pleaded for Guruji's help to get protection from the gangsters and pimps. Not knowing the background, Guruji was mostly unwilling to get involved. But so cruel were the atrocities on those women that as a policeman and at times upon the insistence of his mother, Guruji had to step in. Without going into the details, it must be said that the gangsters of Kamathipura who otherwise wandered freely with naked swords in their hands had fear as well as respect towards Guruji and his Sarvoday Gym team. Those working for the uplift of the trafficked girls often took Guruji's help in their operations. I shall leave the details of this subject to the imagination of the readers.