

# **Holy Mother Ma Sharada Our Inspiration**



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**Do not be afraid !  
Whenever you face difficulties in life,  
Tell your self "I have mother"**

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# Holy Mother Ma Sharada~Our Inspiration

**Written by:** Dr. Lata Desai  
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SEWA Rural,  
Jhagadia 393 110  
Dist Bharuch  
**Phone:** 02645 220811  
**Email:** [sewarural@ymail.com](mailto:sewarural@ymail.com); [smvs1985@yahoo.co.in](mailto:smvs1985@yahoo.co.in)

**Printer: Address:**  
Society for Education Welfare and Action Rural-SEWA Rural,  
Jhagadia  
Phone: 02645-220021  
E-Mail: [sewarural@ymail.com](mailto:sewarural@ymail.com)

Dedicated to  
all those who are  
eager to live peaceful and  
joyous life.

## Acknowledgment

Women of Sharada Mahila Vikas Society family have contributed the most towards the publication of this book. They have written their experiences based on what they have learnt from the life of Ma Sri Sharada Devi, during her janma jayanti celebrations.

The head of Ramkrishna Ashram Rajkot, Swami Nikhileswaranandaji's encouragement also played an important role. We are grateful to him for writing the Forward to this book.

I thank Dr. Ushaben Mehta, Nilaben Vora and Dr. Shrey Desai for proofreading and correcting the manuscript.

On behalf of Sharada Mahila Vikas Society

Dr. Lata Desai

## About this Book

Inspired by Sri Sharada Devi's life and teachings, our women's development program was started and has now completed 35 years. During this year, Mother's birthday was celebrated by talks, discussions, dance, drama, quiz competitions, and sometimes lectures by various Sanyasinis and swamis as well as close meetings with the founding trustees.

Initially, when the programme was started our women were hesitant to take up any responsibilities. Like Holy Mother, most of the women of Sharada Mahila Vikas Society (SMVS), are poor, illiterate or semi-literate, shy and come from rural areas. So they feel a connection and closeness with Holy mother. Now after getting their inspiration from Ma's life it is no more the case. Thus they are inspired, can understand and adapt her teachings in their lives. Those women who are well educated also felt connection with Holy Mothers teaching and got inspired from her life.

In most of the chapters in this book, how Holy Mother's life inspired these women in facing some situation in their day to day life is described.

In this book, we will talk about how Holy Mother inspired various changes in our personal lives, as well as our family members and those working with us in the organization. We will talk about how Mother's teachings helped us in the midst of trying situation's, to maintain peace and take care of each other's dignity and feelings, as well as amend our speech and behavior. Before joining the organization, most of us looked after our homes and children. Now we have...

- 1) Expanded motherhood by becoming mother of somebody else's children or sometimes converted much slanderous relations between mother in-law and daughter-in-law into mother daughter relations.

- 2) Some girls discharged responsibility of parenthood.
- 3) Started a journey of taking up wonderful leadership by sharing information and improving relations.
- 4) Became revolutionary by giving up social outrage, domestic violence, and harmful inert social customs.
- 5) How they are brought up changes in their married life.
- 6) Learnt to maintain balance between both families by taking up responsibility of their in-laws house as well as parental home after marriage.
- 7) Changed their nature which was angry or outspoken, or offensive and used to hurt others.

Even with these changes, a lot remains to be done. We still fall short in our efforts. Path is rough and difficult. With faith and hope and Ma's blessings we will be able to reach our destination slowly but surely.

Some of the names have been changes in these case studies presented in the book and some have been retained. Necessary changes has been made for ease of reading. This book has been published with contributions made by many individuals. I am thankful to Geetaben Shrivatsan, Savitriben Sundaram of Ankleshwer and Jayaben Ayyer of Bharuch who have taken a whole-hearted interest in translating the script from Gujarati to English.

We have provided references so that reader can know the sources of incidences, episodes, reminiscences and utterances.

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Dr. Lata Desai

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Fax : 0281 - 2480404  
E-mail : rkmrajkot@gmail.com  
Website : www.rkmrajkot.org




**Shri Ramakrishna Ashrama**  
Dr. Yagnik Road, Rajkot - 360 001.  
Phones : 2465200, 2463000

## Foreword

I am glad to know that inspired by the life and teachings of Ma Sharada, women empowerment programme was started in SEWA Rural, Jhagadia and has now completed 35 years. I am also glad to know that during these years, Holy Mother's birthday was celebrated by arranging inspiring lectures of Sanyasinis and swamis as well as group discussions, dance, drama, quiz competitions and so on. How Mother's teaching helps women has been brought out in this book by Dr. Lataben Desai. Women brought about changes in their own life as well as their family and social lives. They have developed their innate leadership quality as well as faced injustices and atrocities. They have written about these incidences frankly. "Ma Sharada – Our Inspiration" is a collection of their experiences. The revolutionary steps they took against social evils, regarding marriage and girls' education, how they expanded their motherhood and other qualities are given in this book. I heartily welcome this novel idea. This book strengthens our faith that some peace and joy may be attained in this transient world.

The life and message of Ma Sharada still remains unknown to most people in Gujarat. I believe this book will inspire such people. My heartfelt prayer is that the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna, Ma Sharada and Swami Vivekananda may shower on all the readers.

Date: 20.07.2022

  
(Swami Nikhileshwarananda)  
Adhyaksha  
Shri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot

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# 1 Teachings of Holy Mother

- "If you want mental peace do not find fault in others..."
- The purpose of our lives becomes fulfilled, when we strive to make others happy
- As long as I live, so long, do I learn
- Grief is the gift of God
- The creation itself is full of miseries and happiness.
- Do not hurt others with harsh words, even if they are true
- The household is of the Lord and so ...
- Treat all the work as worship of God
- Forbearance is a great virtue. There is no other like it.

"If you want mental peace do not find fault in others..."

This was her final message to all her disciples and devotees. All those who strive to internalize and own up to this message can be sure to have peace of mind and eternal happiness. Just 5 days before Ma left her mortal body, a female devotee came to meet her. By signals, Ma called her to her side. In a voice choking with emotion, the woman asked Ma, "Ma, what will happen to us?" In a weak and compassionate voice, Ma replied, "What are you afraid of?" Then slowly she continued, "Child, understand one thing. If you wish to have peace, do not find faults in others, recognize your own faults; learn to own up the whole world as your own; no one is there who is not yours, all are your own."(1)

### **I learnt do not find Fault in Others**

**My name is Sarojben.** I have been working in this organization for more than 15 years. This year during the celebration of Ma Sharada's Birthday celebrations, there was a group discussion wherein I got the opportunity to think about and discuss the following message. This was told to her disciple Ma Annapurna a week before her passing away.

If you wish to have peace, do not find faults in others, recognize your own faults; learn to own up the whole world as your own; no one is there who is not yours, all are your own.”<sup>1</sup>

One day, I was not feeling well. As the doctor lives in our society, I went to his house at 8 O' clock at night. He opened the door and soon I started narrating my problem. He got very annoyed even before listening to me and I returned home disappointed. On introspection, within a short period I understood and experience the true meaning of Ma Sharada's above message in my life. But now, two thoughts came to my mind. One, did I do anything wrong in this context? Two, was I right to disturb the doctor late at night ? If I were in his place, how would I react and how would I have talked to the patient ? I went to his house with a minor ailment without taking an appointment or asking his prior permission. Was this the proper thing to do? I thus understood the defect in my own behavior and felt that I should apologize to the doctor.

I reached back home thinking such thoughts. Then the phone rang and I heard the voice of the doctor. “For your illness, I found the medicines and they are kept on my table”. On hearing this, I immediately went to his house, apologized for disturbing him at an untimely hour. At that time the doctor also politely told me, “I did get angry with you then. You can visit me whenever you have a problem.”

I understood that, when unexpected incidents occur, one should not point fingers at the person opposite me; instead I should place myself in that position and think about the same incident from his/her point of view. At that time, we will understand our own defects. One feels like apologizing to the person in front of you and when you do so, your mind becomes light and that person's response will also be positive. Both feel happy and at peace within. Let's remember Ma's words and work in the direction in which we find peace and happiness within us.

"The purpose of our lives becomes fulfilled  
When we strive to make others happy"

The mother would mention the following incident in the Master's life to teach the boys that one should not give up sympathy for others for the sake of one's own selfish ends. The master was one day returning home from the direction of the Bhuticanal at Kamarpukar. It had rained. As a stream of water was pouring into the pond, a magur fish was washed ashore, and it was now gasping for breath, being deposited on dry land. The master who was kindness and sympathy personified was very much pained to see the suffering of the fish due to lack of water. He at once picked it up and put it back into the pond. Oh, how happy the fish was, getting back into the water! The master too, was filled with joy seeing it sporting in the water. Hriday was coming behind him. When he heard from the Master about this, He was very sorry and said to him " Uncle What did you do? "How could you put such a fish so, delicious to eat, back into the pond? The Master simply laughed at his remark. The thought of the satisfaction of his own palate never crossed his mind. He was happy in the happiness of the fish. One cannot make another happy unless once gives up one's own selfish enjoyment. The worth of the man's life is to be measured by the extent of the joy one has been able to give to others. This was a teaching which she often imparted. (2)



## I could realize the truth of this profound message of Ma Sharada

**My name is Faridaben Sheikh.** This year during Ma Sharada Jayanti celebration, all of us were asked to speak about what we learnt from the life of Ma. I stood up and spoke about her life experiences with reference to Ma's teaching "When we strive to make others happy, the purpose of our lives becomes fulfilled". From our institution every year the staff who were working in the Papad, Snacks and Garment divisions would go on a tour. This time we decided to visit Srinathji, Pushkar, Ajmer, Dakor etc. places. Everyone was very excited about the trip, but the papad section had not completed the production as per the orders. Therefore it was decided to keep the production going. Then the questions arose as to who will knead the flour for papad, transport it to the two villages, do the packing etc. Further, who will take the responsibility of giving the snacks for the hospitalized women and students of VGTK, as well as of the sales counter also were to be considered. On realizing these issues, the enthusiasm of all the staff was dampened. At that time, I offered to take on all these responsibilities of 4-5 staff and they all proceeded on the tour as planned. On return from the trip, a meeting was arranged to discuss the trip. Everyone shared their experiences, the places visited, how much each person enjoyed etc. They all expressed, in particular, that they could go only because Faridaben took on the responsibilities of many of us during the days of the tour. They thanked me immensely for this. Although I did feel left out and by not going with everyone, when I realized how much my colleagues and staff friends enjoyed the trip because of me, I became happy and had no regrets in missing the trip.

## As long as I live so long do I learn

Holy mother used to quote this message of Shri Ramakrishna to her devotees frequently.

During Shri Ramakrishna's last illness he was staying at Shyamapukur and Dr. Sarkar was treating him. Dr. Sarkar told him that most of the scientists do not accept the existence of God. Those who accept the existence of God, but only according to their own conception of Him and say that His power is limited because of their pride in their learning...

I have never thought that I know everything. Whatever knowledge I have acquired is insignificant, almost nothing. There are so many things yet to learn. Then listening to all these dialogues, Ramakrishna told the doctor. "You are right". The vanity of leaning is one of the fetters that bind human beings. It is God's grace that you have learned so much but still don't have that kind of egotism. Dr. Sarkar excited to hear this from Shri Ramakrishna and said, "I believe or rather I actually perceive that everyone knows something that I don't. I think that I may have many things to learn from your devotees. For that reason I am ready to take the dust of their feet."

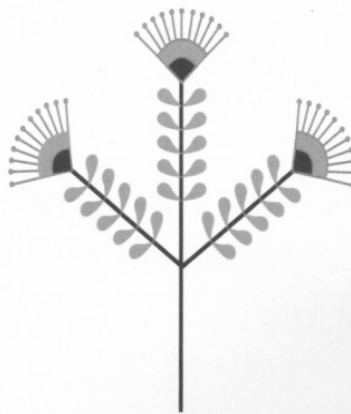
After listening these sentences from Dr. Sarkar, Shri Ramakrishna turned towards devotees and said : "as long as I live, So long do I learn" Indicating the doctor the Master told them "Have you seen how humble he is ? There is substance in him that is why he has such a wonderful understanding. (3)

## Continue to Learn as long as we live

**My name is Geetaben.** I have done MSW. I am working in SMVS in our quarterly publication of SMVS called “Sharada Suwas”, I read the lines “Let us learn as long as we live”.

This message inspired and influenced me a lot. I continue to learn new things on a regular basis. I also got an opportunity to discuss about this message of Ma Sharada with other members of the organization in a group discussion session.

My family life and working life both have been influenced by this important teaching. I have been able to solve many personal and professional problems and also resolve many conflicts in my personal life too. I can certainly say with self-confidence to all that "**Continue to Learn as long as you live**"; message has made a big change for the better in my life.



## "Grief is the Gift of God"

On 22nd July 1918, Sarayubaladevi a woman devotee of Holy Mother writes in her memory about Holy Mother. "It was half past seven in the evening and I had gone to see Mother. After some casual talk, Mother said "People complain about their grief and sorrows.... How much they pray to God but find no relief from pain..... But grief itself is a gift from God."

My own mind was heavy with sorrow that day. Had mother realized that she deliberately uttered these words? She continued to say "Tell me, who is there in this world who has not had to bear sorrow? Vrinda once said to Lord Krishna, "Who said you are merciful? As Ram you filled Sita's life with sorrow", as Krishna you filled Radha's life with sorrow. In Kamsa's prison your parents wept for you night and day." (4)



## My hard and difficult days are a Gift of God

**My name is Meena.** I belong to a poor family of Jhagadia. I could study up to 9<sup>th</sup> standard in a school nearby. Due to my circumstances, I could not study further; I started doing housework in a house nearby to help my family. Soon I also learnt cooking. Thus my life situation was very tough. My hard working nature and perseverance were recognized by my elder where I was working who encouraged me.

With such encouragement, along with the house work, I restarted my study which was stopped earlier. Going to school, studying, preparation for exams etc. along with my daily housework was not easy. But my nature helped me to cope with the difficulties. You may find it difficult to believe me, but in between my daily work I went to school, passed 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> standards and joined a college in Bharuch and completed my graduation (B.A.). My happiness knew no bounds then. But my family started to worry whether they can find a suitably educated boy from my community to get me married to. They got me married and I went to live in my in-laws' house. They were in hair cutting business, they were orthodox in their outlook and I was working in Jhagadia. My in-laws did not want their son to live with me separately as he will be considered “ghar jamai” (husband living in wife's house). However, after sometime, my husband got a job in Jhagadia and we shifted to Jhagadia. I have two children, my son has become a Textile Engineer and my daughter has passed B.Sc. I am living happily with my small family in the quarters provided by the organization. The most important point for me is that I am happy and proud of being a member of this organization.

## "The creation itself is full of miseries and happiness"

"Holy mother's disciple swami Arupananda writes about his conversation with Holy Mother on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1910. He asked mother "if there exists some being called God, why is there so much suffering and misery in the world? Has He not the power to remove it." Mother replied "the creation itself is full of misery and happiness. Every action brings its own result." Many disciples and devotees used to ask the question about suffering. Mother used to reply "difficulties come in life, but they also do not last. Like the water flowing under a bridge, they will keep on going away. "

Could anyone appreciate happiness if misery did not exist ?  
Besides how is it possible for all persons to be happy ? ( 5)



## Happiness & sadness is the law of nature

**My name is Sarla.** After our marriage, I was happy for a few months. Our family had 9-10 members; my husband was working in another village as a DG set operator. He would leave home in the morning at 8 O' clock and return at around 5 pm. The atmosphere of my in-laws' house was very different from that of my parents' house. There was alcohol addiction in the members of the house, whole day there was quarreling among the members for some reason or the other; sometimes about food, sometimes about housework, on some days about people who come to visit; even about small issues everyone argued and fought.

I applied to SEWA Rural for a job , but it took sometime to get it. I kept crying, blaming my fate for my condition, and thinking what kind of life I am leading!! I got so frustrated, I thought of committing suicide and started finding even the ways for it. One day there was an accident with the DG set at the place where my husband was working and the DG set did not restart again.

Thereafter my husband was discharged from his job. The financial condition was bad, he did not go to work. We kept quarreling with each other, with my mother-in-law taunting the whole day. I thought of returning to my parents' house, but my parents were no more. Questions like whether my brother and sister-in-law will accept me or not kept troubling me. I thought suicide is the best solution to all my problems.

At that point I got a message from SEWA Rural asking me to come for interview for a job. I appeared for interview, I got selected and we shifted from the village to Jhagadia !! My life changed.

In one of our meeting our respected elder asked us if we have any question. I gathered courage and told her about my problem. She listened to me calmly with patience.

She told me Ma Sharda's above mentioned message to remove any suicidal thoughts from my mind. One should not lose faith and courage while facing difficulties. One should think of God at those times and face the problems bravely. Then you can overcome the difficulties.

## "No one is unhappy forever"

“This creation is full of pleasures and pains. If there is no pain, how can one experience pleasure ? How can all be content all the time ?”: A Sanyasi devotee asked Ma once, “If God is there, why is there so much sorrow in the world ? Can't He see the sufferings of people ? Doesn't He have the power to remove the undesired situations in life?”

Then she told the story of Ram and Sita. Once Sita asked Ram: Why are you not removing the sorrows of people? If you want, each and every subject of your country can live in happiness. Shri Ramachandraji replied, “Can we Make everyone happy at the same time?” Sitaji replied, “Whatever you wish is possible. Why don't you satisfy all their desires from your treasury?” Ramachandraji said, “Yes, it shall be done.” Then he called Lakshman and told him, “Go and inform all my subjects that all their needs will be fulfilled from my treasury.” When people came to know this, they all came and presented their needs. The treasury was opened and the wealth was distributed to people as per their requirements. Everyone started to live in contentment. After a few days, there was a crack in the roof of the royal palace due to which water started to drip down. For the repair of the broken roof, mason was called. But neither mason nor any laborers were available to carry out the work. All subjects of the country also had similar complaints due to which their houses and even palaces were falling down. When there was no solution to be found for the problem of the leakage, Sitaji went to Shri Ramachandraji and said, “One cannot remain wet like this, please return back to the original condition wherein we can find masons and other workmen. Now I understand that each and every one cannot be happy simultaneously. (6)



## I believe that no one remains sorrowful permanently

**My name is Charu.** I have been working in the Papad section. Nobody can remain permanently unhappy. During the celebration of Ma Sharada's Janma Jayanti (birth anniversary), I heard the message that nobody can remain unhappy forever but I was not convinced about it but from following incidence I realized that this is true.

I was working in the Papad section of SMVS. Everything was going on well. But one day unexpectedly a misfortune struck us. The woman who has been working as the in-charge of Papad section met with a fatal accident and passed away. In her place another woman was appointed as the one in-charge. She was of very strict nature. Her style of working, approach to work etc. was different and transfer of working staff was also done. I found the working atmosphere very difficult due to these reasons. During our meetings all these issues were discussed. Being the most senior person in the section, everyone felt it was my responsibility to place various women staff. I was disappointed for sometime but one day I was sitting by myself and thinking about Ma Sharada's message and my faith, I became quiet and accepting the situation gracefully and became happy again.

Then, I started working sincerely to make this message reach all of my co-workers by reading and discussing it during our meeting. To follow this spiritual path steadfastly, I have started doing introspection. Now I am feeling good and am hoping to find and accept many more such teachings in my life. Even now, I enjoy the reading sessions (where such messages are discussed) during our meetings and work to make my future happy by working with the right attitude and approach. I am also progressing in my spiritual path which has helped me be happy. If one understands the truth about this life, I strongly believe that many roads will open up and no person remains sorrowful permanently.

"Do not hurt others with harsh words,  
even if they are true"

Golap Ma was one of Shri Ramakrishna's main women devotees as well as a close companion of Holy Mother who lived with her permanently. She was very frugal in her expenditure but was kind hearted and charitable. She loved orderliness and cleanliness. However besides all these noble qualities, she was extremely outspoken. She could not control her speech.

On one occasion when the Holy Mother was traveling by train Swami Brahmanand, a spiritual son of Shri Thakur and Swami Premanand a direct disciple of Thakur went to the railway station to receive her. As Golap Ma was helping the Holy Mother from the train, the two swamis rushed to take the dust of her feet; Golap Ma stopped them with her high pitched voice. "Maharaj you have no sense whatsoever, The mother has just gotten off the train, tired and worn by the burning sun., If you make such a fuss about prostrating, how can I restrain the others ?" The swamis were abashed and stepped back.

This incident shows that she was a well wisher of the Mother but she had hurt the feelings of both the swamis. Golap Ma was extremely outspoken without caring about other's feelings, she freely expressed her opinion not even sparing the Holy Mother. The Holy Mother did not mind however because she knew that she was her well-wisher and that her words spoken from her heart and not motivated by malice. But from time to time Mother warned her not to hurt the devotees with harsh words even if they were since it would result in making Mother's life miserable. (7)

## I avoid speaking harsh truth

**My name is Meena**, a staff member of SMVS. Due to qualities like perseverance and systematic approach, I was made in-charge of papad section. I was very particular about the way things should be done and I used to tell my co-workers on their face whenever I thought things were not proper. However, I was also compassionate by nature. If someone had told me that my words had hurt them, I would feel bad about it. While working in SMVS, I as well as my family members got the chance to progress in the spiritual path.

I learnt that I cannot work to improve all other persons. But I must understand what are the shortcomings and defects in me and I can work to improve myself. Due to my habit of direct and clear speech, earlier, others used to get hurt; but now I feel I have improved my nature in this regard. I feel I have been careful not to hurt them.

All the ideas I learnt by reading, listening to others and discussions during the Birth Anniversary celebrations of Ma Sharada have helped me to find inner peace. Ma Sharada had told Golap Ma, “Do not speak in a manner in which the other person gets hurt even if it is the truth”. I repeatedly remember this teaching of Ma. Compared to earlier times, now I find encouragement and inspiration to work peacefully. I always avoid speaking unpleasantly even if it the truth.

I can work peacefully by avoiding speaking harsh truth.

## "The household of the Lord and so ..."

The Mother never tolerated her householder devotees developing indifference and disorderliness in the discharge of their worldly duties under the guise of spirituality. The household is the Lord's and so, whatever duty He has entrusted one with should be discharged well, depending entirely upon Him. This was her teaching to all, whether men or women. She further taught: "If sorrows and troubles assail you, call on the Master, and He will show you the way". The Mother would be sorry for those who ran away from their duties. She would say, "Even the Master, who would not know whether his wearing cloth was on or off, had so many worries about me! The Mother said that the Master used to think much about her welfare. Troubled by thoughts as to where she would stay, how she would manage to have her food and clothing, he would ask certain devotees, "well, my dear sir, if one has six or seven hundred rupees, could women maintain herself in a village?" The Mother said, "For this purpose the Master had collected some money and given it to me." One day he asked her, "Where have you kept the money?" On the Mother replying, "In the pot where I keep the condiments", the Master was perturbed and asked, "Is it how money is to be kept?" It is said that about six hundred rupees were collected. The money was later deposited in the Zamindari account of Balaram Basu, and it fetched an interest of Rs. 2 per month for her. In speaking on these matters, the Mother would say smilingly, "Now see how much money is coming and is being used by His will!" (8).

I realized that my household is of God's

**My name is Jyoti.** I live in the campus of SEWA Rural. I have also been participating in the celebration of the birth anniversary of Ma Sharada. Ma used to say 'Your house is God's'. Whatever activities have been assigned to us by God, we should do with the full support of God, to the best of our ability; I keep on remembering Ma's words.

I live in an ordinary family, leading a householder's life with moderate financial means, because of which my life was thrifty. But even under such circumstances, whenever we had a guest, he or she was treated well with good food etc. Due to my thrifty nature, we did not face much financial problems.

After storing the grain for the whole year, there is no shortage of it during the year even when extra people are there to eat many a times. Sometimes we feel how so many people could eat from this much grain!!! This is my truth. Grains are never in shortage. We live believing this and considering everything as God's blessings !



## "Treat all the work as worship of God"

Mataji's disciple Rasbihari Maharaj at Jayramvati narrated one incident of Ma's reminiscence to Mataji's householder devotee Chandra Mohan Dutt. One day, with a burning heart, Rasbihari Maharaj asked Ma whether he will have to spend his whole life doing work like supervision of building construction, account maintenance, purchases from market, etc.? Ma replied to him very calmly, "My son, tell me what else you would like to do? Presently, to have perception of God, Swamiji has shown this precise path. You will definitely get emancipation if you treat all the work as worship of God without thinking about results. What else you would like to do? Do you want to do penance at Himalaya? You will see Sadhus there fighting among each other for a piece of Roti or blanket for protection against cold. If you leave all this work to go to forest or caves or mountain and sit there quietly closing your eyes, do you think you will find God in front of you? Don't you think that path shown by Narendra is better one? What will you prefer to do compared to this work? Whatever you are doing is service to God only. You imagine that you are doing for God only. Why do you think that this is all your work? Look at me." As per her command I looked at her. Instead of simple sober Mataji I saw living Goddess with heap of luster sparkling all around. I couldn't look at that Goddess for more time. Speechless and frightened, I closed my eyes. After some time, he again heard the familiar voice of Mataji. "Rasbihari what happened to you suddenly? Why you have shut your eyes? Look at me." And Maharaj opened his eyes and again he could see a very familiar face with a smile. (9)

## I try to do all my work with attitude of pooja

I am a staff member of Sharada Mahila Vikas Society. I belong to a small village Juni Jithardi near Karjan in Vadodara district. I got married to a person who is working in Jhagadia's SEWA Rural organization where women are being taught various skills for improving their income earning capacity.

After my marriage, initial years were spent in setting up and managing my family. One of the women working in SMVS had the skill and experience in handicraft work, so she had started teaching this and I joined the class to learn the same. I thus got the opportunity to learn new things like making sofa covers and, cushions cover etc. I got paid as per the work I did. But the income from this was not much as the compensation received was not proportional to the work done. Further, the marketing of the items prepared was also a problem. Therefore this activity was stopped later.

Afterwards I got the opportunity to work in the Papad section on part time basis. Noting that my co-workers were getting paid on weekly basis, I also started doing such work. I was doing small odd jobs and feeling happy within.

Subsequently, I was made the manager of production section. I learnt where to procure the raw materials from, their prices, quality, timely procurement, inventory management, etc. To ensure good quality of the Papad that was being made by the women of the villages, I entered all the data in the computer and analyzed the same. I carry out all this work with self-confidence. I always remember Ma Sharada's words, "No work is small or big. All our actions should be done with the attitude of Pooja (worship to God)"

"Forbearance is a great virtue.  
There is no other like it"

Ma lived in a joint family with nephews, nieces, brothers and sisters-in-law who were selfish, arrogant, foul-mouthed, temperamental and eccentric in nature. In such an atmosphere and with such a group of people it was common to have misunderstandings and angry exchanges over small matters, sometimes even to the extent of getting physically assaulted. Once the mad aunt started abusing violently and said to Mother you are giving opium to Radhu and keeping her under your control. Then taking in hand a piece of fuel she tried to strike the Mother on the head. Mother's disciplerani and snatched it. (10)

After the passing away of her husband Ramkrishnadev, Mother had to live with her family members of various nature. The members of the family included her nephew Ramlal who stopped the small pension of Rs. 7 that Ma was getting Ramlal told to the cashier of the temple that the devotees of the Master were looking after her and there was no need for an allowance from the temple. So the allowance stopped. Swami Vivekananda and others argued against such a step and when the Mother heard of it She said 'what I shall do with the money. (11)

The nephew Hridayram who lived with them repeatedly insulted her. Once Mother with her own mother Laxmidevi and some others went to Dakshineswar. By watching them Hriday said 'Why have they come? What have you to do here? He showed his disrespect to them in this way..Mother and grand- mother did not respond to it. The Master also kept mum. Without any complain against the Master at all, or any ill feeling to wards his nephew Hriday, they all left that very day. Mother did not say anything. (12).



## I learnt forbearance is the foremost quality

**I am Sarala Vasava.** I was born in a small village in Tapi district. After my marriage I came to Jhagadia. I have been working for the past 8 years in Sharada Mahila Vikas Society which is a part of SEWA Rural. Every year we celebrate the Birth Anniversary of Ma Sharada. During last year's celebration, we discussed the message of Ma "There is no other quality to have like Tolerance and there is no other strength like tolerance". I talked about my own experience in this regard.

Before my marriage I studied tailoring in a mission-run organization in Bharuch. I passed the technical exam conducted by the government with first rank. Looking at my work, the Madam who was the in-charge of the class made me an instructor there. I taught the skill to about 150 students there. When she came to know that I was going to Jhagadia, she informed me that similar work is being done in SEWA Rural too and you can join there. Due to my previous teaching experience in Bharuch, I could get a job here at SMVS.

But... due to the wrong attitude of my husband I started facing many problems at home, and after sometime the problems became so difficult to face that we were about to get separated. It became very hard for me to live in that house. Then I remembered and thought about how much Ma Sharada had to suffer in her life. Then I became strong and learned to face the harassment of my in-laws, and husband, forgave them and faced them with tolerance. Today I am living happily with my husband and child, forgetting the past incidents. If I were not working in SMVS, I would not be having a family and a happy life. The biggest factor in my life is my experience and the values I learnt at the organization. Due to my work in SMVS, I could build my house and live with my husband, both of us doing our duties diligently and taking care of our child. Thus I learned that Patience and forbearance are the foremost qualities in a person.

## 2 Universal Motherhood

### The motherly attitude of Ma Sharada

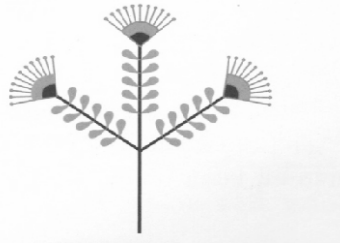
Ma Sharada lived a pure and holy life of a Brahmacharini. Though she did not have children born of her flesh and blood, she became a mother to one and all, whether rich or poor, Hindu or Muslim, sinful or of good deeds. Whoever was sorrowful facing the various difficulties of life whether of India or of other countries, can read various incidences in the chapter "The Mother" by Swami Gambhiranand.

As for example A Drunkard Vinod Vihari Som Muslim son Amzad, poor Haridas Vairagi from village Deshda foreigner's daughter Maregret Nobel Elizabeth from England (5), a lady from untouchable caste, a women facing worldly struggle<sup>7</sup>, Sanyasi sons of Ramkrishna Mission<sup>8</sup>, All of those who came in contact with Ma Sharada experienced the Mother & Child relationship.



## The Motherly attitude of SMVS Staff

**My name is Subhadraben Dineshbhai Vasava.** I live in Khariya village and am 35 years of age. My husband is a daily wages worker. I have two children. I have been working for 10 years at SMVS making Papads. My husband used to get drunk and come home and physically abuse me. I used to feel very frustrated and repeatedly the thoughts of ending my life used to come in my mind. I even stopped going to work. However, when my co-staff at SMVS came to know of my situation, they came home, talked to me and counseled me. They also talked to my husband and counseled him. Like a mother they talked with love and care with us. This incident re-lit the lamp of hopes in me. Thinking of my children, I stopped the suicidal thoughts. I started working again. My husband goes out to work if he gets some work, otherwise he stays home. He has also started helping me in making papads. Whatever money he gets when he goes out to work he gives it to me. He also doesn't harass me physically. Occasionally he drinks alcohol, but does not misbehave with me. He also does agricultural work. He contributes the money earned for running the household and we live happily.



## **3** Leadership Qualities

### Ma Sharada as a leader

During Celebration of Ma's Anniversary we recognized her many leadership qualities . We also tried to emulate in our work to a smaller degree. In 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century saints and ascetics of various sects we considered service to humanity as a hindrance to spiritual life. Swami Vivekananda had faced severe protest and disagreement from his fellow workers and devotees to establish Ramkrishna Mission. Listening to all such talks Ma Sharada said “This Math will continue to run the way it is, those who cannot back this may leave this place”. (1) Thus Ma took a courageous step as a leader.

Ma Sharada has shown the wisdom to maintain cordial relation by love as a guiding force as a leader. In one of the branch centre of mission some one used to give orders and expecting work by keeping narrow mind. Ma used to tell them even children may leave us if we scold them very often. (2)

Ma was a strict discipliner. While observing the rules and regulation making exceptions as and when needed. In the year 1990 relief work during famine only the deserving people used to get relief material determine by making home visits. Those who had gone to work were not supposed to get relief material. Once a sadhu narrated a story of a mother who had given birth to a baby the previous night, kept the child in a corner and doing the sewing work. Getting this information though the poor lady was not entitled to get relief material the Sadhu made an exception to provide it. When Ma hear about this story she said to the sadhu “child I am happy that you made some exception to took right decision”(3).

## We got out from the clutches of money lender !!

This is the story of the women of Jhagadia and Khariya villages.

**Maniben Vasava** used to earn a living by making Papads and by joining the Savings group of women, she used to do regular savings too. Unexpectedly her mother passed away. She came to know that her father had to pawn her mother's jewelry to perform the last rites. When Maniben came to know about this, she immediately went to her father. She took loan against her own savings and she returned to the money lender all the loan taken by her father from him, as also released her mother's jewelry and brought it home.

**Geetaben Vasava** has been working for the past 15 years in the Papad section. She used to do regular savings and whenever needed, she would avail loan against it. Her husband used to do odd jobs and was earning a very small income. Because of this, whenever unexpected expenses were incurred, they used to take loans from the moneylenders. On pawning the jewelry only, one could get loans. Now she could take loan against her own savings and release her jewelry pawned earlier.

**Devuben** was a resident of Jhagadia village. She owned 8 acres of land in milkat and had some gold ornaments. Her husband was diagnosed with throat cancer and for his treatment cost of Rs. 4 lakhs she pawned her land. The daily interest cost of this loan was Rs. 100/- and the major part of her only son's daily wages went towards this. It was nearly 5 years since she took the loan and she didn't know how much interest she had already paid. The person who loaned the capital with interest has also been taking away the produce from the land. How much money has been given like this also was not clear to her.

Further, the jewelry which was pawned also could not be taken back due to inability to pay capital and interest and she lost the same to the lender. Thus, though she lost all her property and gold, she didn't lose her courage and hope. She continued to make Papad and earn; her daughter also helped her in this work. After sometime, she took loan against her savings and she slowly repaid the loan. She also brought up her children, educated them, got them married. Finally, she was able to come out of the clutches of the moneylender. Her son is also earning reasonably well and now she is leading a happy life.

## 4 Spiritual Outlook

### Ma became the role model by preserving the moral values

Ma Sharada firmly believed “Moral Values are the foundation of Spirituality”. This is reflected in many incidents from her own life. There are many examples where she took decisions without considering her personal inconveniences as well other family members desires. Ma was suffering from arthritis and to get relief from arthritic pain she was using spirit as a remedy. During the time of first world war, there was a shortage of spirit and it was difficult to get it from the Market. At his time a disciple made arrangements to get small quantity of spirits to be kept separately to be used by Ma, She did not agree with this request and replied “I can not use it for my comfort by depriving the patients”. (1)

There is another incidence that occurred in relation to dealing with the building of Thakur's temple in his birth place. The property naturally belong to Thakur's family. After the temple was built Thakur's relatives thought that the property will remain with their family. After hearing about this, Ma retorted “What type of talk is this ? After the temple is built the Sadhus of Belur Math will take the responsibility for the birth place of Ramakrishna and temple." Thus neglecting the desires of her relatives Ma took balance without getting carried away by family pressure. (2)

## We are happy to work by preserving moral values

Ma Sharada's life is a source of inspiration to us. We have many incidences to present here. We will restrict by presenting only one of them.

I am in charge of the Marketing department of the Papad Manufacturing unit in our organisation. We strictly adhere to the driving principles of our organisation and there are no two ways about it.

We have been operating our Papad manufacturing unit for the past 35 years. In the face of increasing corruption, it is becoming almost impossible for us to function while upholding our moral values. The cost of the raw materials used in the making of papad, like urad dal, pepper, and asafetida is constantly rising. We are known for the purity of our product, so the question of adulteration does not arise at all. Our main intention is to provide a livelihood to the poor and needy women in our area. We have therefore been forced to increase the price of the papads at regular intervals or else the institution would have to bear the loss.

A few years ago, when the unit was making a loss, the staff and the women who were making the papads met and had a free and frank discussion about the situation. The women had a separate discussion amongst themselves. What is most noteworthy is that all these women in one voice requested the staff to take back the raise they had been given. They were determined not to compromise the quality of the product by using adulterated material but make good quality papads, and makeup for the loss by increasing the quantity.

Moreover, the provision store owner at Haripura, Shri Jagdishbhai, and the owner of Ganga Jamuna Hotel Shri Nimeleshbhai supported us by purchasing our papads though they were slightly more expensive.

**5****Happy & peaceful married life****Giving respect and dignity  
to each other**

In spite of leading a life of sacrifice and renunciation, Ma Sharada and the Paramahansa lead a blissful Marital life throughout.

Maa was much younger than Shri Ramakrishna. Shri Ramakrishna was always alert in seeing that she was never insulted and made to feel inferior. He ensured that she was treated with utmost respect and dignity. She came to her husband's house for the first time when she was 13 years old. Husband Ramakrishna taught his teen age wife about small household things carefully and politely. e.g. how to express respect towards elders, how to treat the guests etc. (1)



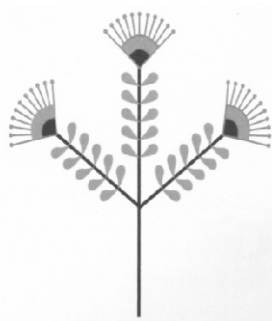


## We received respect and cooperation from each other

**My name is Najma.** My husband has been working for SEWA Rural. Our financial situation is not very good. I have been wanting to do something and contribute to the family income.

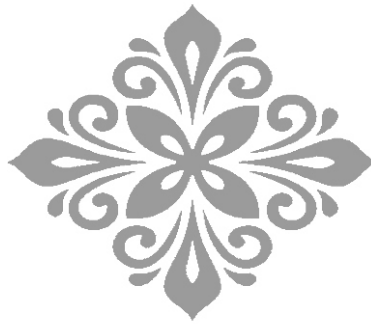
My husband encouraged me to join the garment department. I was a little hesitant as I didn't know how to sew. My husband told me that if I took up the job, he would support me. I also decided that, come what may, I would learn to sew. Slowly, with the support of my husband and the cooperation of my fellow students, I learned the various aspects of stitching.

I got an opportunity to share my success story with others, at a program organized by the Kharel Gram Seva Trust . The appreciation that I received from everyone for my clear presentation has made me more confident. I owe my progress and success to my husband's continued support and cooperation. Due to this our marital life is running smoothly.



## Shri Ramkrishana's Pride for Ma Sharada

There is yet another example of Shri Ramakrishna's respect for and pride in Ma Sharada. One day when Ma keeping the plate of food for him in his room, was returning, he said, "Close the door properly when you leave." Ma replied, "Yes, I have closed the door properly." As soon as he heard her voice, he was surprised and said, "Oh, is that you? I thought It was Niece Lakshmi. Please don't take my words to heart." Having made such a mistake unknowingly, he felt so embarrassed and repented. The next morning he went to her room and told her, "See, I felt so bad yesterday that I could not sleep the whole night. I kept thinking how I could talk to you so rudely?" Ma always used to tell her disciples that, "I have been married to such a husband who has never disrespected me, he has not hurt me even with a flower."(2)



## Love, Trust and Co-operation for a successful Marriage

**My name is Daksha.** I have been working since before my wedding. Then I got married. I continued my job from my in laws house. My husband was also of the opinion that I should continue working. He explained to all the members of the house that we both would understand each other and continue our jobs.

At home we both understand each other's responsibility and share the work. My husband doesn't have any problems doing any kind of domestic work. My job entails my travelling out of town. So there are days when I am delayed in returning home. To this day, & it has been 13 years since our marriage, he has never once asked me, "Why are you late?" He knows full well that I must have been delayed due to work. He doesn't even discuss the matter with me. Of my own accord, when I tell him the reason for the delay, he listens patiently.

If there is no one else at home and I need to attend a social function, my husband goes to the extent of taking a day off from work, to look after the child. I do not need to tell him that I cannot take a holiday. What I wish to say is that he considers my job to be equally important. If someone asks me if it is possible to lead a peaceful life within the limitations imposed by marriage, then my answer would be a resounding Yes, provided they are ready to treat each other as "Equals".

### Mother as an Ideal Householder

Mother's life as an Ideal role model as householder, in her parental home as well as a daughter-in-law, wife, and aunt in her in-laws home.

At her parental home as her younger brother, Kali mama said about her work as a young girl at home: "For our well-being, what all things she did! She used to take care of all of us, younger ones. She would take us daily to the Amodariver and bathe us, she used to feed us and wading in neck-deep water she carried cut grass for feeding the cattle. Our mother involved Her in the work in the field, especially for collecting the cotton from the cotton plant and making the thread needed for producing Janoi (the sacred thread worn by Brahmins) which was sold in the market for buying us clothes and other things. Additionally, the work of husking the paddy, feeding grass to the cattle, cooking meals and a lot of other household work was also done alone by my elder sister." (1)

After marriage, Ma led the life of a married woman skillfully. To most people she was a calm and quite shy woman from a rural village who was engaged in the routine work at home. On seeing how Ma was fulfilling her responsibilities, Swami Premanandji noted, "It seems as if Goddess Rajarajeshwari herself on her own will is plastering the floor with cow dung, cleaning the utensils or removing the dirty dishes of the devotees. The one who advised others on household duties, herself struggled in her life. She has tremendous strength within her, limitless compassion and most of all she was free from ego." (2)

## I took up the responsibility of my family

**My name is Vanitaben Rajubhai Vasava** and I am from Khariya village. I lost my father when I was studying in Class 3. As my mother had to go to work, I left my studies and stayed back to look after my four younger siblings. My mother earned the paltry sum of ₹ 200, which was insufficient for us to run the family. Therefore, I got the papadough from SMVS and started making Papads for them.

Then, my mother stopped going for labour work and joined me in making Papads. With what we earned together, we were able to save money and also conduct my marriage. Since it was difficult for my mother to work and look after my younger siblings, I convinced my husband to stay with my family. I continued to make papads and we were able to save some money too. With that money we were able to get my three younger sisters married. Thus, I reduced my mother's responsibility considerably.

Though my husband works elsewhere, whenever he has time, he helps us in making papads. Now we are all living happily together.

In my village Khariya, many families like mine have also been able to improve their economic status because of the work given by SMVS, and all this while working from home.

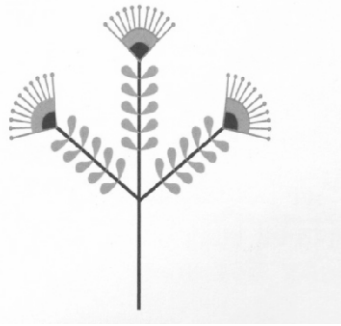
## 7 Women-Embodiment of strength of various energy

If we go through the history of mankind in all religion, women are worshiped as various forms of energy - Goddesses. In Hindu scriptures, she is revered as Devi. as in Devi Suktam.(1) In Devi Stuti it is said that, She is abiding in the form of power, intelligence, peace, beauty, contentment, kindness, motherhood etc. She pervades and abides in the universe in all beings as reflected consciousness. Devi Suktam with lyrics is as described below. There are many quality of divine mother manifested in Ma Sharada's life. In this chapter we will describe three of them through various incidences.

या देवी सर्व भूतेषु मातृरुपेण संस्थिता ।  
नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमो नमः ॥ ..... (1)

या देवी सर्व भूतेषु बुद्धिरुपेण संस्थिता ।  
नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमो नमः ॥ ..... (2)

या देवी सर्व भूतेषु तुष्टिरुपेण संस्थिता ।  
नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमो नमः ॥ ..... (3)



## Worldwide example of women empowerment

We know that in Sri Ma Sharada's life all these qualities are manifested very well. Sri Ma Sharada was an illiterate village girl but at the time of her birth centenary, a celebration at a world conference, it was attended by various religious leaders from India and abroad as well as devotees and scientists. After various discussions and exchange of ideas during the summit they concluded that Her luminous and victorious life is a worldwide example of women empowerment. Sri Sharada Devi the Great Wonder. (2)

### Symbol of embodiment of various energies - Binaben

Born & brought up at Baroda city, Binaben came to Jhagadia- a rural tribal village. After marriage she was full of energy. She joined SMVS to work for Women empowerment programme.

Starting her work as an ordinary worker she became supervisor, organizer and then became an important member of executive committee. While looking after the papad project she managed the marketing work efficiently that is to get the orders and its timely recovery of money. The way she would talk with managers of various industries and canteen was better to see rather than talk about it.

She became friend to many, sister or daughter to someone, mother to many and thus she had special place in many families. To protect the girls and women against domestic and social violence she went all the way to the Himachal Pradesh for Training.

## Embodiment of motherly quality of Ma Sharada

**Motherly Quality of Ma Sharada :** There are many instances in Sri Ma Sharada's chhudi life where Her motherly qualities are manifested. Once due to a dreadful famine, her kind-hearted father used rice, meant for yearly storage, for famine affected people.

Vegetable hotch-potch (Khichudi) was prepared at home only and small Sharada used to serve hot Khichudi to famine affected poor people. To cool it down she used to blow fan & used to feed with her small hands.(3)

या देवी सर्व भूतेषु मातृरूपेण संस्थिता....





## I got motherly love

My name is **Vidhyaben Fatehsinghbhai Rathod**. I stay at Sultanpura in Jhagadia village. I am 55 years old. I am making papad at Shree Sharda Mahila Vikas Samiti since last 25 years. My husband is unemployed and is at home only and abuses a lot. There is no other source of income. My younger son used to drink a lot. I left my papad work also. I broke down mentally. In this situation I decided to end my life and poured kerosine all over my body. But nearby people came to know about it and they stopped me.

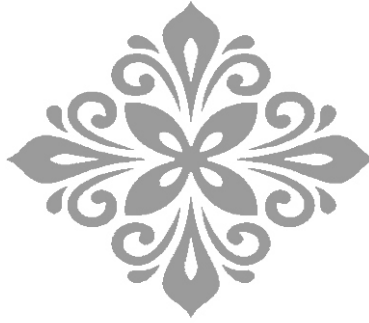
I reached SMVS to meet my group people. With tearful eyes I informed them of my situation and asked what should I do? I am in a painful situation with nobody to support me. My parents are poor. Where should I go? After lots of persuasion I realized that my sisters are with me. I could feel their warmth. My staff sisters have expressed mother-like love and kindness towards me and made loan arrangement for my mortgaged ornaments. This support gave me much needed fortitude to restart papad work. Gradually mental problem has also reduced. The staff from SMVS came to meet my husband also. I started feeling relaxed in my mind. I no longer have suicidal thoughts.



## Contentment-Quality of Ma Sharada

When during the Master's illness at Cossipore, His nephew Ramlal came to see Him one day, the Master told him 'You will serve Ma Kali and then turn to the mother and said you will live at Kamarpukur.. To Ramlal again He said 'See that your aunt stays at Kamarpukur. Ramlal replied 'She will stay wherever she wills.' After the passing away of her husband Ramakrishnadev, she had to live with Her family members of various nature. The members of the family included her nephew Ramlal who stopped the small pension of Rs. 7 that Ma was getting. Ramlal told the cashier of the temple that the devotees of the Master were looking after Her and there was no need for an allowance from the temple. So that it was stopped. Swami Vivekananda and others argued against such a step. when the Mother herd of it said "what I shall do with money. while living in Kamrarpukur." There were times when She ate boiled rice but had no salt to savor with it.(4)

या देवी सर्व भूतेषु तृष्टी रूपेण संस्थिता....

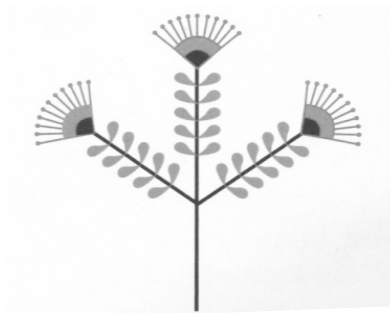


## I am content to fulfill the needs of my children

In the words of **Tejuben**. "When I was not working in SMVS, it was extremely difficult for me to make ends meet on a single income, especially with young children in the family."

Then I started rolling Papads. I kept thinking of all the things that I would be able to do with the extra money I earned. My children were unable to sleep because of the mosquitoes, so I started rolling more papads to augment my income and I could buy a fan. Now I am extremely happy that my children are able to sleep peacefully at night.

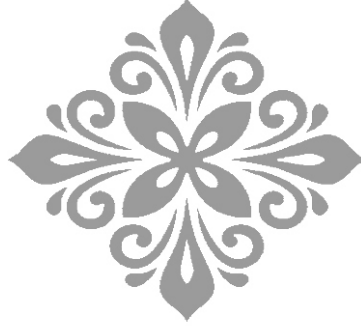
Then another incident took place. I had some unexpected visitors at home and I wanted to serve them mango juice. So, I sent my daughter to borrow a mixer from my neighbors. My daughter came back empty handed and said, "Henceforth we will not beg for things from our neighbors." That day I determined to work even harder and saved some money to buy a mixer. We are now able to fulfill our needs.



## A great learner~ Intelligent Ma Sharada

Ma Sharada was ever ready to gather information, knowledge and understanding of different issues. During the time of first world war (Years 1914 to 1918) She inquired about the news of the war. She said "what a tremendous sacrifice of lives has there been - what a machine for killing they have invented !!!" At the same time she praised the benefit of the various inventions. (5)

या देवी सर्व भूतेषु बुद्धिरूपेण संस्थिता....



We illiterate women have learnt to even use the calculator for tallying the accounts

**My name is Pushpaben Mukeshbhai Vasava.** Though I have studied upto Class 5, I am practically illiterate, as I do not know even simple addition and subtraction. When I got married I knew nothing except household work. But I was very keen to learn new things. Therefore, I started rolling papads in my free time. Thus, I spent my time fruitfully. With my additional income, we could save some money. It was decided to form independent groups where the women would maintain accounts of their savings. When they decided to make me a group leader, I became nervous as I didn't know anything about maintaining accounts. But the staff members of SMVS assured me that they would help me to learn everything. Every month they taught me to maintain accounts during the committee meetings.

Since I was not very comfortable doing it, they gave me a calculator. They also taught me the numbers in English. As a result, the other group leaders and I started maintaining accounts that ran into lakhs of rupees. Since we were able to tally the accounts, we had great fun using the calculator. We then even taught our husbands to use the calculator. When the need arises, they also take help of the calculator to do the accounts in their work place.

### Ma Sharada's courage in facing domestic violence

Sexual harassment has been prevailing across all sections of society since time immemorial. Even Ma Sharada fell prey to it.

Once a devotee named Harish cast his lustful eyes on Ma Sharada. He started chasing her, but Ma understood his evil intentions and She ran in circles around the food pantry. However Harish kept chasing Her, so Ma pushed him to the ground, placed Her knee on his chest, pulled his tongue out and slapped him so hard that Her hands too became red. Unable to bear the assault, Harish went away.(1)

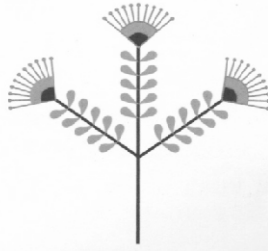


## I escaped violence from my neighborhood boy

**My name is Hansa.** After completing my class 12 Arts from the local school, I pursued the Nursing course in SMVS.

One day as usual I was making my way to my college on a road which was largely deserted. On hearing the sound of an approaching vehicle, I turned back and saw it was a car. Not paying much attention, I continued on my way. The car stopped near me and I recognized the boy who got down as someone who lived opposite my house. He caught hold of my hand and asked me to come with him. I tried to free my hand and call my brother on my mobile phone, but he snatched it.

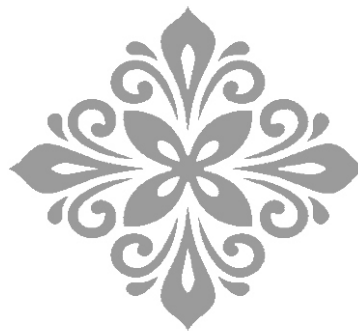
When I refused to go with him, he dragged me forcibly into his car. I got scared and didn't know what to do. He pushed me into the car, and made his way to the drivers seat. I seized the opportunity, opened the car door and ran for my life and reached the house of an uncle. I borrowed his phone & rang my brother. I told him about the incident and asked him to take me home. When the guy saw me talking to the elderly man, he got into his car & went away.



## 9 Proponent of girl's skills development

Ma Sharada never had the opportunity to attend formal school. Nevertheless, she had the skills to make beautiful cushions, pillows and fans from cotton, jute and silk materials. She did not generally depend on others.

Ma Sharada sent Sarala, a brahmin disciple for nursing training even against the objections from orthodox Golap Ma, mother said “what is wrong in that ?”, She blessed Sarala by putting Her hand on Sarala's head and said “My child don't be afraid” Sarala took three years of training as a nurse in Lady Duffrin Hospital in Kolkatta, and became a registered nurse. Later on as a nurse, she took care of Ma Sharada as well as many disciples and devotees. (1)





## I became a nurse and made others happy

**My name is Roshni.** I had absolutely no interest in studies. But my father, who had studied only up-to class 3, wished to see his daughter study and become independent. But at that time, one of our friends, who was working as Asha worker, told me about the interviews taking place at SMVS for the Nursing course. As soon as my father heard this, he told me to apply for it immediately. At the insistence of my father, I decided to appear for the interview. I performed well in it and was selected for the course. We had to walk the distance to Jhagadia and report for duty by 7.30 am.

Initially, while doing the rounds of the wards, watching the deliveries, surgeries, the sight of blood and stench of perspiration, all these made me dizzy. I ran away a couple of times, but my father explained to me that I had to learn to face such situations in the future. Eventually I decided that I would finish the course and become a nurse.

After three months we had an examination. Till then I had faced only written exams, where the only fear was of failure. But this time, it was a practical exam on a live patient. I was terrified that I would do something wrong that would cost the patient's life. Somehow, I managed to give the exam and surprisingly came 2nd. In the class. I gained self-confidence. I started enjoying myself with my friends. Alongside our studies we would participate in the programs, quizzes and cultural events and also go on tours.

My first job was at Mother's Day Hospital in Surat. My father was a little hesitant to send me so far. I then reminded him that it was with his encouragement that I had gone to Jhagadia and accomplished so much. I also convinced him that I was confident of taking care of myself in Surat.

Finally, I wish to tell girls like me that they should not be afraid or hesitant but they should try their best to become self-reliant. Being Happy ourselves we can spread Happiness.

## Ma Sharada Integrator of modern and Ancient Ideals

In 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the context of widowhood, marriage, girls education, social service and spirituality Ma Sharada took many steps which shows She is an Ideal Integrator of modern and ancient ideas.

**Ma's views regarding widows:** Usually Ma didn't wish to hurt the sentiments of anybody by going against established traditions. But she felt equally strongly that it was necessary to bring about a change in those beliefs that crushed the dignity of the common man. In that context, let us recount some anecdotes where Ma Sharada tried to bring about a change in the outlook of Her disciples as well as Herself.

Kshirodbala was married at the tender age of 10, and became a widow at the age of 15 she was made to have her hair according to the prevalent customs. Ma advised her thus: "When you were young it was right to cut your hair as you would have had to take care of it and it would have led to temptation. But now that you have grown up and are above desires there is no need to follow such harsh customs. (1)

Ma Sharada herself was widowed at a young age of 33 years. Living in an orthodox family and society, suffering the harassment of family members and society, She stood firm in Her resolve to live without shaving Her hair (as per customs), she continued to wear sari with red borders and gold bangles on her hands.(2)

**I am a widow, I did not allow my children  
to feel the absence of their father**

**My name is Bhanuben.** I still remember the day I came to live in my in-laws' house in Jhagadia with lots of hope and expectations. My small family consisted of the two of us, our two sons and one daughter. When the children were small my husband passed away. The responsibility of the house and children fell on my shoulders. I started making papad, then I worked in the court and at a bank. I joined the saving and credit groups. By me taking loans from the group, people used to talk all kinds of things. However I could furnish my house and educate my children.

Now let me talk about my children. Although I remained a single parent, with hard work and being continuously on my feet, I could educate my children. Both my sons passed I.T.I., one in the mechanical line and the other did CNC also after ITI. Both are employed in industries.

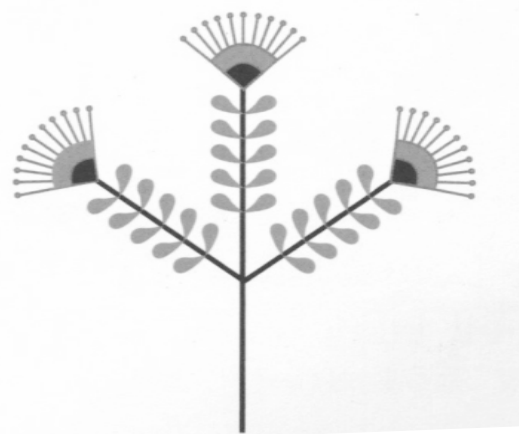
I would like to talk about my daughter also. She was very good in studies. She enjoyed studies and hard work. When she was enrolled in college and started going, family members and neighbors started making fun of me. They started asking, "After you educate her so highly, who will marry her?" But I did not lose courage. My daughter completed M. Com. and did a one year course. Now she works as a Data Entry Operator in the Jhagadia Taluka Panchayat office. In a few months she is going to get married. My sons have also done well. They are working as engineers with good salaries in the nearby industries.

In this manner, in spite of the various challenges I faced, including sneering from my own relatives, with hard work and courage I did not make my children feel the absence of their father.

## Integration of Modern and Ancient Ideals

### Ma's modern views about marriage

Although Mother got married at a very young age as was the custom at that time, when she grew up, her thoughts were modern and progressive. Ma guided girls and women to stand up on their feet and live self-dependent life with self confidence. She even encouraged those girls who did not want to get married to remain single. Further, when parents were forcing young daughters to get married against their consent, Ma advised the parents to enroll them in school and get an education. Ma explained to them that the girls will learn new things, they will live happily, doing good for themselves and others. It is unfair to get them forcefully married and face the problems of life. It is less troublesome to remain single as compared to living under the control of someone else and arbitrarily following their whims and fancies.(3) Ma guided and taught women to stand up on their feet and live a self-dependent life with self-confidence. (4)



## I Left my married life & Live independent and happy Life

I am a daughter of middle class family. I studied hard and completed M. A. B. ed. Then I joined the Tutorial classes of SMVS.

After some time I got married and my tragic life started. My husband was working in a school as a temporary teacher. After sometime he got laid off. Her family was full of superstitions. Believing in Bhagat bhuva, Dora Dhaga they started talking that the husband's lay off is because of bad omens of newly married wife.

My husband could not get new jobs for 9 months. In the home if any unexpected bad event happened the family started putting the blame on me. I got disgusted and left my in laws home and went to my parental home in Jhagadia.

One day I got telephone call from my in laws house, asking me to visit a temple on Pavagadh mountain with putting bands on my foot and climbing bare foot. If I can do that I will be considered innocent and not responsible for any misfortune occurring in the family. I refused to do that and came back to my parental home at Jhagadia.

Now I restarted working as a teacher as well as in the hospital to fill up the online Data of various Government Scheme. I travel on my two wheeler when ever and where ever needed. In 2021 I got best Karyakar Award of my department and now I live an independent free and happy Life.

## Integration of Modern and Ancient Ideals

### Ma's Views about self-dependence

Ma Sharda had a sweet relation with the Nivedita school. She was full of praise for the administrative capacity of sister Nivedita and Sudhira didi. Sister Sudhira didi dedicated her life for educating the girls for self dependence. (5) She earned the sincerest praise of the Mother.(1) Ma used to praise Sudhira didi who remained unmarried and who was very effectively discharging her duty as principal of Nivedita school, saying that, "How nice a girl she is, traveling alone in a car and also self-reliant." (6)



## I live a self-dependent life

**My name is Neetaben.** I am 30 years old and have a daughter who is now 6 years old. I studied upto B.Com. and also got training in montessori and in Computer. I was married at the age of 22 years and I was very happy in my married life. One dhuleti day, we all went to the Narmada river side and we were playing by the river banks, having a lot of fun. Suddenly my husband who was playing in the water with my daughter and other family members, got pulled into the river and drowned.

Form any days, I used to sit quietly as I was still shocked with what happened. I had no strength to even think about what is ahead and how to face the situation. After some days, I started to accept the situation in which God has placed me. Now what ? My family was familiar with Sharada Mahila Vikas Society (SMVS) and I also had heard that at SMVS women are given opportunity and support to work, be self-reliant and move forward. I also got the opportunity to work at SMVS as a teacher at the tutorial section.

Earlier I would never go alone anywhere. Now I bought two wheeler Vehicle and move about move about freely where ever I have to go.

Now I have enrolled my daughter in an English medium school in Bharuch. I am happy to spend about Rs. Forty thousands per year for her education. I wear clothes and ornaments I wish to wear, I whatever I want to eat and if there is any work outside I do it by myself.

## Integration of Modern and Ancient Ideals

### Integration of Spirituality and Service

In 19<sup>th</sup> century saints and ascetics of various religious and sects used to prefer to stay in solitude for spiritual practice. Serving humanity was treated to be against scriptures and holy books.

Ma Sharada was working until the last moment of Her life as an ideal Karmayogi. In the year 1912 when Mataji visited the widowed women ashram run by Shri Ramakrishna Mission, she said “to serve these helpless old women is like serving God.” (7)

Ascetics who had given up the world went to her and said selling books, maintaining accounts, running Ashramas are not suitable for saintly life. After all if somebody wants to do something they should involve themselves in worship, rosary, meditation etc. All other work attracts mind towards sensual pleasure and one becomes averse to God. Ma listened to them and then replied "How many can do meditation and rosary and worship for the whole day ? It is better to work keeping the mind steady without wavering. If mind becomes unoccupied it creates difficulties and problems.(8)



## Yo mat Bhakth sa me priyah

**My name is Rama :** I served in the sales department. One day a staff member bought something worth of Rs. 101. As I was busy with other customers she put the money on the table and left. After I became free. I looked for it everywhere but could not find it. Soon after on the same day on the very same table I found a Rs. 500 note. I thought I had made a mistake and hence try to tally accounts. I found that I was in excess of Rs. 500. I informed my senior and they sent some other lady to check the account. They found that there was an excess of Rs. 500 and shortfall of Rs. 100. I started talking to Ma "I asked you for only Rs. 100. Why have you given me Rs. 500. Are trying to test me? Till today we don't know what was happening. I deposited the excess Rs. 500 with the organisation and paid the shortfall of Rs. 100 from my own pocket.

One day I was chatting with my friend and discussing about our day to day working as well as family etc. I said to my friend I pray to Bal Gopal everyday and whenever I face some problem I would talk to the Lord and I get solace.

Someone may take it as my superstition but I have strong faith that. "Yo mat Bhakth sa me priyah".

## 11 Karmayog

### Karmayogini Ma Sharada

Ma Sharada carried out Her family and societal responsibilities with sincerity and non attachment. She was an example of a true Karmayogi.

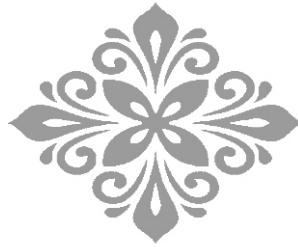
Ma gave a lot of freedom to Her students but when necessary she also became a strict disciplinarian expecting all to follow the set of rules.

In 1919, about 15 days before Durga Pooja, four-4 resident brahmacharis of the ashram left for Kashi without applying for leave as per ashram rule. On the way they went to seek Ma's blessings. She inquired about whether they had taken permission from the head of the Math. They replied “No Ma, yesterday evening when we were walking on the Math road, one of us suggested that this road will lead to Kashi. Then we decided to go to Kashi and did not seek the permission” Ma told them that they return immediately. (1)

## Keeping the discipline of the group, how we recovered the loan with Interest

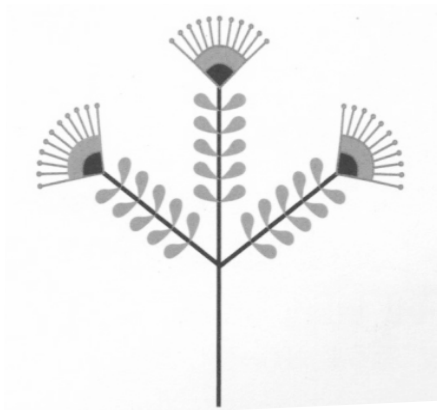
“I am not going to repay the amount, if you want to pay you can.” These were the words of a member of the Savings Group. When she became a member, she had taken a loan of Rs. 10,000/-. As per the rules, the loan amount has to be returned within one year period. On completion of a year from the date of the loan, she did not return any money. When other members reminded her about it, the above words were uttered by her. This problem was put for discussion in the Group and it was decided that each and every member of the Group will go to her house and ask for the return of the money. But members decided that they will not speak out loudly and they did not wish to have a fight over it at her house. They will speak to the members of her house including elders in a calm way.

As per the decision, all the members got together, went to her house and talked in a calm manner. The members of the group waited for a week. Subsequently about 30-40 women of the group went to her house. After that within a week she returned the money with interest. This is how all women jointly enforced the rules of the group.



### Economically independent Ma Sharada

After the Mahasamadhi of Her husband, Ma did not have even proper clothes to wear. She used to protect her body by tying 10-12 knots with the cloth she had. Further, on many days she only had plain rice and salt to eat. Her husband's nephew stopped the pension she was getting from Dakshineswar temple. Ma's disciples thought of raising objections and taking actions against this decision. When the mother heard of it, she said with extreme indifference, "If they have stopped it, let them have their way. When even the Master is gone, what shall I do with money."(1) Ma stopped them from taking such steps.



## We poor women become economically independent

Ma was advising women to become economically independent. The women of our village understood and adapted Ma's advice and living courageous independent lives. There are more than 500 women who have become economically self dependent.

**Radhaben working in sanck section** talked about her situation. "We belong to poor families; to get two meals a day, we have to do labour work outside and look after the household too. SMVS is safe and secure place for women and thus I joined the Snacks section of SMVS. Now I am enjoying peaceful life, there is security of earning, it is a clean work environment and women can work safely here. We sell our snacks to near by industries too."

**Kaliben** said "like me separated, widow women become economically self dependent"

**Kalibehan** said, "After the birth of 3 children, I got separated from my husband and came back to my parents' house. After studying tailoring, I took training in SMVS and joined the Garments Section. From my salary, I am educating my children, supporting my family, doing savings; I have also benefitted from the gifts received and the outstation tours. I know how to go to the bank and do the transactions. I also learnt how to interact with others." These are examples of the lives and experiences of some of us.

### Scientific attitude of uneducated Ma Sharada

Though Ma Sharada had no formal education, she wished that her disciples and Brahmacharis learn English language, and she appointed a teacher also for this purpose. Her idea was that by reading English newspapers, they could get the news from all over the world. She said because of scientific advancement our lives have become very comfortable. How we used to toil and trudge. To reach Calcutta in those days."(1) Thus Ma encouraged everyone to adopt and use these scientific advances. Here in this chapter we will narrate two stories where women adopted scientific attitude.



## We reached Mumbai....So Soon....

We are partly educated women from the villages and we realized how much the scientific advances and discoveries have helped our lives when we went to Mumbai on a tour. Let's hear from the women this unique experience of the Mumbai tour. We reached Mumbai by train. Then we traveled by local bus and saw more than 30 places including Elephanta caves, temples, Dargha etc. After this we all went for shopping. There were not just one or two small shops, but there were very large shopping centres which are called malls.

One can get all kinds of things needed for day-to-day life in malls, and one doesn't even have to climb steps to get to the various levels. Machines (Escalators) take us upstairs and downstairs. We women from small villages were happy, surprised and impressed seeing this. We purchased small things too. We were very happy to see the biggest city of Maharashtra, Mumbai.



## We are not responsible for giving birth to girl children

**My name is Damayanti.** My husband's house is in a small village near Jhagadia. I have become mother to three girl children and from then on my life and the lives of my daughters have been very distressing. My elder sister-in-law is so lucky that she gave birth to two boy children. Whenever any new things are bought and brought to the house, they were first given to these boys. A few days ago I came to know that my husband is planning to marry again. Seeing the situation around in my house and hearing about this, my life has become unbearable.

At this point in my life, an incident took place that changed my life, ending my sorrow and distress. My luck changed for the better. One day, the health workers wished me to join a one-day Shibir. I also wanted a break from the binding and suffocating atmosphere of the house, so I got ready to go to the Shibir. There were many stalls, in one stall the women played some games with us. Then one of us was given a red ribbon and another a yellow ribbon. Red ribbon represented a girl's seed and yellow that of boy's. Every person, male or female have two seeds (chromosomes). The seeds in women are both for girl and the ones in men are one each for boy and girl. During conception, one seed from the woman and one from the man combine together to form the fetus of the child.

It is at this time, that the sex of the child is determined. During conception, mother's one seed (mother has two identical seeds) combines with either of the two seeds from the father, one of them corresponds to girl and the other to boy. Depending on which seed from the father combines with that from mother, the baby will be girl or boy. From this it is clear that the sex of the child is decided entirely by the father's seed. The choice of this is neither in the hands of mother nor the father. It is decided by the nature, or we can say, by God. We women are not at all responsible for the sex of the babies born to us. Due to ignorance of this, many women in the village are persecuted by family members like mother-in-law, sister-in-law, neighbors and other villagers for giving birth to girl children. Such women live miserable sad lives. Illiterate women like us learnt how the gender of our children are decided by nature with the science behind it. I came to realize that I am not responsible for giving birth to girl children.



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## Glossary

Thakur	- Shri Ramakrishna
Master	- Shri Ramakrishna
Mataji	- Shri Sharada Devi
Ma	- Shri Sharada Devi
Mother	- Shri Sharada Devi
Holy Mother	- Shri Sharada Devi
Jayramvati	- Birth Place of Holy Mother
Kamarpukur	- Birth Place of Shri Ramakrishna
Dakshineshwar	- Holy place where Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother lived
Kashi / Benaras/ Varanshi	- Holy place of India
Nahabat	- Holy mother's residence at Dakshineshwar
Ashram	- Spiritual residence
Ahankar	- Egoism
Ram	- An ideal prince of great spiritual height who lived in ancient India; considered to be an Incarnation of God by the Hindus
Sita	- Consort of Ram
Swami	- Hindu Monk
Sanyasi-	Man - who has renounced the worldly ties
Sanyasini	- Woman who has renounced the worldly ties
Jhagadia	- A name of village where head quarters of SEWA Rural and Sharada Mahila Vikas Society are located

## Abbreviation Reference books / Sources

SG	- Swami Gambhirananda
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GDC	- The gospel of the holy mother by Devotee children
RSD	- Reminiscences of Sri Sarda Devi Monastics, Devotees and Others - Compiled and edited in Bengali by Swami Purnatmananda, Translated by Maltiben Sengupta
DS	Devi Suktam, Ya devi sarva bhuteshu - lyrics -तस्मै ताभ्याम तेभ्यः..या देवी सर्वभूतेषू
SSDGW	- Sri Sharada devi, the great wonder
SEWA Rural	- Society for Education Welfare and Action Rural
SMVS	- Sharda Mahila Vikas Society



## Quotes of Ma Sharada

- If you want mental peace do not find fault in others...
- The purpose of our lives becomes fulfilled, when we strive to make others happy
- I learn as long as I live
- Grief is the Gift of God
- The creation itself is full of misery and happiness.
- No One is Unhappy for Ever
- Do not hurt others with harsh words even if they are true.
- The household is of the Lord and so ...
- Treat all the work as worship of God
- Forbearance is a great virtue. There is no other like it.



## Prayer to Ma Sharada



### ○ Mother Sharada

- Inspire us so that we mutually complement and support the lives of our family members, and those whom we work with.
- **Give us strength and wisdom** so that our motherhood remains not limited to only to our children but of other's as well.
- Inspire the young and old to be eager to accept and take responsibilities, learn and teach new skills., so that there is no dearth of sincere and efficient women in rural areas.
- Give us understanding and courage to change social evils which have permeated the society and accepted without thought, for generations.
- Give us the insight to overcome our feminine weaknesses and limitations, so that we can work together for the betterment of society.