

RESOURCE 6.5

Sant Jalaram Bapa: an eighteenth-century guru

Rajbai Thakar lived in Gujarat in India over 220 years ago. In 1799 CE, pregnant for the second time, she was told by a local saint that her child would be famous for encouraging others to do good deeds. She was delighted and named her baby boy Jalaram. She taught him all she knew about Hindu dharma. Even as a small boy he loved to sing to Lord Rama, and he devoted his life to God. When he grew up, he did become famous.

While they were still teenagers, Jalaram and Virbai married. They went on a pilgrimage together and it changed their lives. They decided to set up a new kind of spiritual kitchen. They called it Sadavrat. Any poor person and any religious person who was serving God but not earning money could come to Sadavrat and get free food. No one was ever turned away without food.

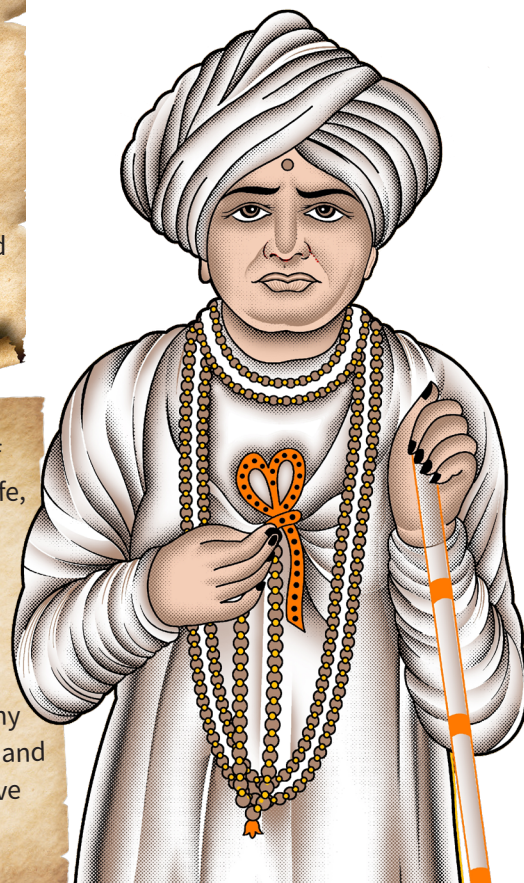
Virbai and Jalaram were good farmers, and they grew their own grain. Instead of selling produce like other farmers they used the grain to make the food to feed the growing numbers of hungry people who came to Sadavrat. It was like a big food bank. The people who came to eat also experienced the devotion and love for the Hindu deities that Virbai and Jalaram showed. But the numbers kept growing, and one day Virbai and Jalaram had nothing to give to the hungry people at their door.

Virbai had been given golden jewellery to wear when she married Jalaram. They thought about the gold, and the hungry people. Virbai chose to sell her jewellery to buy the food they needed to feed the hungry people who they loved so much. Everyone said: 'The food Jalaram and Virbai give us will be returned to them at the gate of heaven.'

Devotees of Jalaram Bapa say that Lord Rama came to Sadavrat in the form of an elderly, starving pilgrim. Jalaram took him in and fed him a good meal. Then Virbai volunteered to look after him and accompany him on his journey. She travelled with him, leaving Jalaram to look after the Sadavrat. Then Jalaram, at home alone, reported hearing the voice of Lord Rama sending him a message.

Jalaram says that Lord Rama told him: 'I heard that you are truly a good man. I came to see for myself, and you truly are a holy person! You can come and be reunited with your wife. I have given her two gifts for you.' When Jalaram met up with Virbai, she told him that the old man had given her his stick and his bag, and then disappeared by the riverside. The stick and the bag are still kept at the Ashram of Jalaram Bapa today.

There are many more stories of Jalaram and Virbai's spiritual life, their care, love, generosity and the ways they inspired others to serve humanity. Their focus remained on serving the poor. Today, over 140 years after Jalaram's death, there are many mandirs named in his honour, and the Sadavrat continues to serve food to anyone and everyone.



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Sant Jalaram Bapa's image is displayed in the centre of the worship space at the mandir. Devotees may bring a gift, bow down to the images or say a prayer.



The main shrine room is upstairs at the temple. People leave their shoes downstairs as a sign of respect. There are lots of images and pictures of Sant Jalaram Bapa.

Here, Virbai and Jalaram harvest their own crops — they were good farmers — to feed any hungry people who came to their free kitchen, the Sadavrat.



This picture shows Virbai and Jalaram Bapa together, wife and husband. They were united in their determination to serve God by feeding hungry people, and were both blessed by the visit of Prince Rama.



Thinking things through:

Find out about the mandir that celebrates the life of Sant Jalaram in Leicester.

Research other mandirs in other parts of the world devoted to the Sant.

List some ways in which Sant Jalaram Bapa has become an inspiring figure to the Hindus in Leicester and around the world.

Look again at the Hindu texts, including the passage from the Bhagavad Gita in Resource 6.3. Highlight the virtues shown by Jalaram Bapa, and by his devotees in this worshipping community.

Links and resources

See more details about Jalaram Bapa at:
jalarambapa.info/bio

This site includes more of the stories and events attributed to him:

jalarambapa.info/tagged/parcha

As well as 16 temples in Gujarat, India, there is a mandir in honour of Jalaram Bapa in Leicester, England:

www.jalarambapa.com

www.jalaramsadavratleicester.org.uk