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I would like to begin by thanking Lord *Ganesha* for His blessings. Then, I would like to thank late Deepa's husband Raja Kodikal, for giving me the privilege and opportunity of editing this valued manuscript. It has been a very rewarding and learning experience for me. He himself is very well-read in spiritual matters, a serious meditator, and a seeker of Truth. I would also sincerely like to thank Gautam Sachdeva and his team at Yogi Impressions, for having faith in Deepa's work on Ganesha, for his patience, suggestions and detailed study of the manuscript. To Surojit Mohan Gupta, for assisting me in the process of editing. I express my gratitude towards Swamini Amitananda of the Vedanta Mission, for very willingly, generously, and genuinely giving her inputs on Sanskrit terminologies, and wherever else required. My husband Suman Jaitly, for patiently listening to the various parts of the book repeatedly as I kept proceeding with the editing, as well as for his

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Deepa had also referenced sources on Ganesha to correlate her own inspiration about Him, and since there is no record of the sources, a big thank you to all the authors, writers, publishers and also to all those unknown people who might have been of help in the process of bringing this book to fruition.

Pari Jaitly

FOREWORD

Deepa's inspiration about Lord Ganesha took form once she started putting it on paper, and thus began the construction of a book that in its simplicity has revealed the ancient wisdom of our scriptures.

I still vividly recall the day in the early 1990s when I met Deepa for the first time, and now I realize what a profound influence she has had on my life. What I thought to be a casual social evening was, for me, the first step on a spiritual journey that would take me full circle to where I am today.

Over many casual meetings, nuggets of wisdom were slipped in by her during courses of conversation so simply and practically, with such ease and casualness, so full of love and compassion, so humbly, so subtly, so powerfully, without even one realizing that these were the blessings of an enlightened being, the realization dawning only after they gently start decoding in your mind later, releasing knowledge within for one to ponder and meditate upon. Participating in these casual conversations and being in her presence was a life-changing gentle process for me over a period of time.

When Raja Kodikal, late Deepa's husband and also a dear friend of mine, requested me to edit and organize the Ganesha manuscript which Deepa had written just before she passed away in 2013,

I was at first very hesitant because I had never done any such work before. But as an afterthought, I realized that I should consider myself blessed and accept it as a privilege and an opportunity to balance out all that I had received from her.

As I proceeded with the editing, the putting together, and the organization of the book, I began to understand that, apart from Deepa's effort, this book had also come together with the grace and help of Ganesha Himself, especially considering Deepa's ill health, her frequent travelling to the hospital, and the dropping of her heartbeat to forty counts a minute for almost a year and a half, in spite of which she moved around normally, which the doctors referred to as a miracle. After reading the entire book, I have also understood that no action in this world can be undertaken and nothing whatsoever can be achieved without Ganesha's support, grace, and blessings.

This book is not only a book about Ganesha, but it is also a book about revelations, a guide as to how life should be lived for one's own evolution.

Today, Lord Ganesha is my best friend, philosopher, and guide. Thanks to Deepa and this book for the understanding that I have gained about Ganesha and about life.

I sincerely pray that Deepa's goal of helping every individual in the process of evolution be realized through the medium of this book and all her previous books. May she manifest in everyone's heart.

AUM

Pari Jaitly

INTRODUCTION

BRAHMANDA-NAYAKA GANESHA THE COSMIC CONTROLLER

Ganesha Appears in a Dream

When I was just a child, I was aghast when one night in my dream I saw Lord Ganesha occupying the small altar meant for my beloved Lord *Krishna*. As there was no trace of Krishna anywhere, I stared incredulously at the impertinent-looking Ganesha. From the glint in His eyes, I knew at once that He had forcefully jostled Krishna from the throne that had always been occupied by Him. By this wicked act, Ganesha had made it apparent that He was expecting me to worship Him instead of my Krishna. I could not believe it! Ganesha actually thought that He could compel me into worshipping Him! I kept staring at His gleeful expression of victory. It was filled with smugness and teasing, almost a provocation, a kind of merriment at my anger and helplessness. I had no special feelings for Ganesha and thought of His high-handed act as outright ungodly and felt that He was abusing His godly status. As I glared at Him, He jumped down from the tiny throne on the altar and, resting His pudgy palms on His broad waist, He chuckled loudly and stared back at me as though daring me. Naively, I thought that my hostile silence would shame Him into leaving! But, how mistaken I was! In fact, He was quite enjoying the fare. Mustering all my dignity and

self-control, quietly, I asked Him to leave. I noted that He was just a kid Himself. Swaying His elephant head sideways, He refused.

I repeated, 'Please leave'.

'I will not', said the young Ganesha.

Controlling my indignation, I said, 'This altar is meant for Krishna, you have no place here. Kindly leave at once.'

Mischievously and defiantly He said, 'No, I will not!', and suddenly, He began to dance with quick intricate footwork. I watched Him for a moment, and then, realizing that He had no intention of leaving, I asked Him where Krishna was. Continuing to dance, He said that Krishna was not coming back.

Taken aback by this impudence, I was about to say something, when I suddenly realized that He was dancing quite divinely. For all His weight and an amazingly protruding belly, He was moving with unbelievable grace and lightness. I was not sure if it was my imagination, but I could hear some heavenly music in the distance accompanied by the reverberating beat of a *damaru*, which is Lord *Shiva's* hand-held drum. As I stood grudgingly admiring Him, I saw that He was actually quite lovable. Time stood still while seeing both of us, blissfully absorbed in the dance and spreading the waves of peace and auspiciousness. Slowly, the scene faded and I woke up.

For quite a few days, I pondered over this dream and wondered if it was a message for me to worship Ganesha instead of Krishna. But Krishna was my heartthrob, and I could not be bothered even for a moment to consider substituting Him with Ganesha. I soon forgot about the dream.

Bhakti, the Outpouring of Love for One's Chosen Deity

Much later, after my marriage, I attended for the first time, the annual elaborate Ganesha *puja* (a ritual of prayer and worship), during the *Ganesh Chaturthi* festival, at my uncle Narsingrao

Kodikal's house in Mumbai, then known as Bombay. The Ganesh Chaturthi festival is a celebration of Lord Ganesha's birth. In Delhi, where I was brought up, this festival was not celebrated on such a massive scale as it was in Maharashtra. During Ganesh Chaturthi, my parents Bhavanishankar and Chitra Bailur used to have a simple ceremony by keeping just a coconut instead of the regular painted clay idol. Dressing up the coconut with *kumkum*—a sacred red pigment used in India for social and religious markings—, silk garments, jewellery, and flowers, they would place it on a silver *kalash*—a silver water pot—kept on a bed of unbroken rice spread on a banana leaf. This simple ensemble sufficed to represent Ganesha.

But, the pomp and splendour with which this festival was celebrated in my uncle's house left a permanent impression on me. There was this large adorable Ganesha idol, auspiciously painted and brought home ceremoniously specially for the occasion, accompanied by continuous musical tolling of bells, the Divine *Mantra-ghosh*, i.e. the loud chanting of *Mantras*, mounds of fragrant flowers, countless flickering lights in intricately shaped brass and silver open lamps, the exhilarating fragrances of incense, the mouth-watering aroma of savouries and special foods, the flurry of activity, the ladies all dolled up in traditional nine-yard sarees and nose rings, the gathering of all the relatives, the endless waiting for the priests, and finally the *Aarti*—a ritual in which small oil or *ghee* (clarified butter) lamps are offered to the deity along with group chanting of hymns.

The praises of Ganesha along with the glowing of countless lamps invoked in me a tremendous upsurge of love for Ganesha. The love was so enriching that I finally understood why the many poet-saints of 'The Bhakti Movement' in India were inspired to compose such rich poetry about their various *Ishta Devatas*—their chosen deities. This *bhakti*, the outpouring of love for one's chosen

deity, is so crucial to life because herein lies total fulfilment, the distilled essence of love and worship coursing through the body, taking the devotee to sublime heights of ecstasy.

I also realized how central were all the various accompaniments, like the incense, the flowers, the lamps, etc., to the ritual of puja, to the process of initiation towards bhakti, to the nurturing, to the flowering out, and to the deepening of love for the Lord. The rituals and the atmosphere put one in the right mood and the right environment, for the seed of bhakti to sprout and grow. Through all the five senses, one is inspired towards a one-pointed devotion, which gradually becomes the mainstay of life. This love generates desirable qualities such as an understanding of others, a feeling of brotherhood and leniency, kindness, generosity, and, most important of all, a feeling of well-being, which is so essential for deep inner satisfaction.

When our uncle Narsingrao Kodikal passed away in early 1979, his sons were already settled abroad. Hence, my husband Raja and I decided to start celebrating the annual Ganesh Chaturthi festival at our home. For this, one brings home a new clay Ganesha idol every year and, after worshipping Him and praying to Him for 1, 3, 5, 7, or 10 days as per one's convenience and choice, immerses this idol in the sea, well or river, with much pomp and farewells, inviting Him to come again the next year. To let this family tradition die down would be a dreadful loss. Therefore, we thought about it a bit and, after a little deliberation, decided to bring Lord Ganesha home even though it involved a lot of work. I think the seeds of our own children's awakening of bhakti lay in this decision. They all love Ganapati, as well as other deities. Of course, we do not celebrate the festival on such a grand scale, but the love and the bhakti are no less. We have stuck to the adage 'if not a flower, at least a petal'. The love for 'Gumps' or 'Ganu', as our

children affectionately call Ganesha, continues unabated.

We took this decision just two days prior to the Ganesh Chaturthi festival that year. We selected a spot in the living room to install the idol for worship. We cleaned up the place and re-arranged the furniture to accommodate all the relatives who would be attending the puja.

That night, in my dream, I had a distinct vision that, at the spot at which we had decided to place the idol, and at a time when nothing moved and not a soul was present, a *Homa*—a sacred fire sacrifice—was going on quietly on its own with gentle tongues of silver-golden flames licking the air. In that silence and stillness was an ethereal auspiciousness and purity. It was Divine and simply gorgeous. I was thrilled. I thought that this was a very auspicious sign. It was as if the power and grace of Lord Ganesha had already descended upon our home. Imagine, just the love for Him and the intent of bringing Him home were enough to propitiate and please Him. The place where Ganesha was to be installed was getting purified on its own. Thus, for us, it was as though the puja had already begun and His grace had sanctified the place and our lives. Ganesha had bestowed His blessings upon us.

Since Ganesha idols can be bought off the shelf, we and our cousin Vasanthi, uncle Narsingrao's daughter, went to buy one. In the very first shop that we visited, there was a tall blue Ganesha in a dancing pose. I immediately chose Him. He also had a flute and a peacock feather, a perfect blend of Krishna and Ganesha. By now, both had become my beloved deities. He looked beautiful. We fell in love with Him, and our mind was set. We could not have left Him behind. I was suddenly reminded of my long-forgotten dream that I had years ago. I remembered how incensed I had been with Ganesha then. But now, I had changed and was mature enough to know that there is no difference between Krishna and Ganesha.

They are all one and the same, in fact, different aspects of the same Eternal, Absolute, Formless Reality—Lord God, the Ultimate. The artist too had intuitively merged the blue of Krishna with the face and body of Ganesha. It was too much of a coincidence to ignore. Excitedly, we brought Him home.

That night, I dreamt that we are all dressed up and sitting in our drawing room waiting for the relatives to arrive. As we waited, someone from outside gently pushed the door open although it was locked from inside, and a long procession of our dead ancestors trooped in. As we watched with our mouths agape, we recognized quite a few of them, though the rest were all distant and unfamiliar. It seemed an endless procession spreading inside and spilling out in the compound as well as the adjoining road. Each ancestor seemed excited to be a part of the celebration, happy to attend a Ganapati puja and partake of the special food, that too at the house of one of the descendants. They were all decked up in their traditional festive dresses and their customary jewellery. It was staggering to see them all together as though they were alive, the only difference being, that they all looked pale ivory, brown and black, just like in old monochromatic films. They had lived and died at different times and places. How had they all managed to gather together now at one place and simply decided jointly to just troop in? Perfectly organized, yet so very casual. Moreover, they all seemed to know the house well! This was all very amazing.

In the morning, I narrated the dream to my husband Raja. We were overjoyed because we took this dream to be the seal of approval of our decision.

Another year, Ganesha taught me something very valuable. We had instructed the statue maker to make for us a clay image of Ganesha, exactly resembling Lord Vitthal of Pandharpur, but, with a golden-complexioned body instead of the regular dark grey

complexion. *Lord Vitthal* is a manifestation of Lord Krishna of Dwarka Himself, having come to Pandharpur in search of His consort Rukmini, who had been hiding there after a tiff with Krishna. The golden Ganapati-Vitthal looked so resplendent and endearing that none in the family had the heart to immerse the idol in the ocean after the puja, as is required by tradition. Thus, it stood in our drawing room, graciously accepting our love and affection, even after the usual 10 days of celebrations. Finally, it was decided to immerse Him along with the next year's idol.

During those 12 months, I often wondered about the wisdom of keeping a breakable clay Ganapati for such a long time in the house. What if an arm broke or the body developed cracks, or the paint peels off? As often as we planned to immerse it, there was either a change of heart or some obstructions preventing us from doing it. And, thus, He remained with us.

When I was particularly perturbed one night, I got a clear message: 'You have often planned to send Me away, but I have remained and there is a reason for this. Having experienced the sublime non-duality, having perceived the highest Truth, you have continued to bow to Me in all humility while knowing that I am a mere clay idol. This is how it should be. Be always humble. Revere always the concept of divinity in everything. Respect the symbol of divinity anywhere and everywhere. My work is done. You may now send Me away.'

The very next day, we consigned Him to the lapping waves of the Arabian Sea at Juhu Beach, Mumbai.

All deities are representations of the Ultimate Lord God, and it really does not matter which deity one refers to as the Ultimate. Worship of any form or any aspect of divinity is tantamount to worship of the same Ultimate Lord. Just as one can reach the same peak of the mountain through different routes, one can reach the

Ultimate through any of the myriad representations of the divinity. Our spiritual goal initially merges us with our chosen deity in its form, finally taking us to the Formless Ultimate. Such merging in the Lord should be our spiritual goal in life. This is the true fundamental human birthright, as well as the intent of nature.

Brahmanda-Nayaka, Ganesha—The Cosmic Controller

As the all-pervasive ‘inner-controller’, Ganesha had controlled and monitored my spiritual progress so that I could slip very casually, with no difficulties whatsoever, into the deep and difficult states of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*—a high state of concentration—and ‘experience’ the oneness with the Ultimate. To such a generous and auspicious deity, the remover of all obstacles, my thousand *pranaams*—salutations. Thus, this book has unfolded as my humble offering to Ganesha.

We as human beings are blessed, because we have the unique ability to rise above the frailties of our all too human consciousness, and merge in the Supreme Universal Consciousness through the medium of these deities. Experiencing the merger in them and then rising above our own limiting human experiences, we can attain, as well as remain in, Divine bliss ourselves. Bliss being an essential aspect of the Universal Consciousness, we can thereafter continue to be in touch with it as a part of the Cosmic Consciousness. We can thus know experientially that we ourselves are the Lord God, that the Lord is us, that together we make up the entirety, that His bliss is our essential nature, and that to experience this merging in the Lord should be our ultimate goal and effort.

This book is about depicting Ganesha as the Ultimate, as an embodiment of the Absolute.

However, to write a book on Ganesha, I had to study Him in order to understand what He signifies and why He has such

an awesome stature even among other mighty deities in the vast pantheon of Indian Gods; why even the greatly revered deities such as *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, and Shiva are shown in our scriptures to worship Him and hold Him in such high esteem; why He is so popular with us all; and why everything auspicious begins with His worship.

As I began studying Him, I came across lofty descriptions such as ‘a prince among poets, Ganesha the original word, Ganesha the God of Dance, Ganesha the very source of music’, and I wondered why this was so. Why is Ganesha called the Lord of Wisdom or the Master of the Arts? In what way is He different from and better than the other super achievers who had gone beyond the outer stretches of excellence in their chosen field, be it dance, music, art, poetry, science, etc., who have reached the zenith, and for whom any further excellence would only have to be a derivative of what they have already achieved?

I knew, of course, that Ganesha would have to be extraordinary to be able to attract and hold so much adulation by us and other deities, but in what way? Ganesha is the heartthrob of India, the pulse of her art and craft, an icon of her learning and culture. It is apparent that Indians, with their intelligence, with their own original, outstanding, and ancient thought, and their philosophy and experiential vision and wisdom, would pray to and eulogize in such a manner only a being beyond the grasp of human intelligence, someone unfathomable, indescribable, and special. However, what other extraordinary power would Ganesha symbolize? Other deities also symbolized tremendous power and knowledge, much more than what humans can visualize or fathom, or even hope to achieve. Yet, these powers and knowledge could somewhat be identified and understood by Indians; therefore, they are familiar with them to a certain extent. Ganesha is unfathomable. Today, it seems that people have forgotten the original cause of His importance although they

continue to give Him all the importance.

I prayed to Ganesha Himself and asked Him how He would like to be portrayed so that people remember and understand anew at least a little of His Cosmic stature, and what His relevance is to the Cosmos and to us. I also expressed the wish to understand why such awesome words like *Brahmanda-Nayaka*, monarch of the ageless and endless firmament, were used for Him? Within moments, I was inspired to write, and what I have written here is the result of the guidance received through that inspiration. As I got more and more insights into Ganesha, I realized that this very inspiration is Ganesha. The stream of words tumbling out is also Ganesha. I began by finding out the dictionary meaning of Ganesha. In Sanskrit, *gana* means a unit or a group acting as a single unit. As I pondered over this, a whole new vista of knowledge unfolded before me. Things started falling into place, and I realized what a stupendous deity we are all praying to. What magnificence of might and power! How fortunate indeed we are to have His grace, and how grateful humanity should be for His brilliant laws and boons.

This is the chronicle of Ganesha as He revealed Himself to me, and the following pages are a testimony of this revelation.

AUM