

### 31. The Shirdi Sai Saga

All festivals have been designed to teach men how to lead a godly life while carrying on worldly activities. It was to teach this truth to mankind that *Avatars* and saints made their advent on earth from time to time.

This day (the first day of Navarathri) has another special significance. Shirdi Sai Baba was born on September 27, 1838. He was born in a poor Brahmin family in the village of Pathri in Aurangaabaadh District. For various reasons the parents left the child. A fakir found him. As he was a foundling, the fakir had no natural affection for him. After some years the boy was handed over to one Gopaal Rao Dheshmukh, who was also called Venkusa by the people on account of his scholarship and wisdom. The boy grew up in Venkusa's home for some time. However, he was not inclined to stay there for long. In 1854 he went to Shirdi. At Shirdi, Mhalaspathi saw him entering the local temple. Looking at his appearance as a Muslim, Mhalaspathi turned him out of the temple. The boy went back and sat under a neem tree. He was sixteen years old at that time. No one knew then what his name was. If anyone asked for his name, he would give no answer. He would sometimes retort saying, "Why do you want to know my name?" Because of this, nobody could find out his name.

#### **Baba the healer**

Some villagers from nearby places used to visit him under the tree and get relief for their ailments. He would take out some leaves, crush them and give them to the ailing person as a medicine. In this manner he cured many persons of their illnesses. News of the healing powers spread to all the surrounding villages. As a result a large number of persons used to come to him, receive the crushed leaves from him and get cured of their ailments.

Suddenly, one morning he disappeared. A futile search was made in the nearby areas to trace him. Later, in 1858, he came to Shirdi again after three years. There was a village called Dhoop in Aurangaabaadh. One Chandhubhai Patel, belonging to a middle class family, lived in Dhoop. As no other form of transport was available in those days, people used to go on horseback.

Chandhubhai went on his horse to Aurangaabaadh on some urgent business. When he had finished his business there at the end of three days, he found that the horse was missing. Disappointed over the missing horse, Chandhubhai was returning to Dhoop passing through dense forests on the way.

#### **Chandhubhai's first encounter with Baba**

At one place, he saw a fakir sitting under a tree in a forest. The fakir appeared to be lost in his own thoughts. Suddenly, the fakir hailed Chandhubhai with the words. "Hey, Patel! Come here." The fakir liked to smoke Chilim (hookah). As there was no water nearby, the fakir hit the ground with a stick and water gushed forth from the place. He hit again another place with a stick and there was a fire. Using the water and the fire, he started smoking his hookah and offered it to Chandhubhai also. Chandhubhai declined the offer.

The fakir asked Chandhubhai, "What is worrying you, Patel"? Patel asked, "How did you know I am Patel?" "I know everything," replied the fakir. "You are worried about your horse. You are keeping your eyes on the top of your head! You must lower them to trace the horse. Your horse is grazing under the tree there." He had made the search for the horse in the same place with some workers but could not find it. Now he saw it under a tree close to him. Chandhubhai was

astonished that the fakir had produced water and fire out of the earth and had located his missing horse. He appealed to the fakir: "Swami! You have rendered great help to me. Please come with me and share my hospitality." "All fight, let us go," he said.

About this time, the marriage of Chandhubhai's niece, who was residing in Shirdi, was settled. Chandhubhai had to go to Shirdi for the wedding. He requested the fakir to come along with him. They went in carts to Shirdi. Mhalaspathi saw the fakir getting down from a cart and went to him and said: "Aayiye, Baba! Aayiye Sai!" (Come, Baba! Come Sai!) The name "Sai" was given by Mhalaspathi. Till then, no one had conferred a name on him.

Sometime later, Baba was involved in a criminal case. He had to give evidence in a case which related to the theft of some valuables from a rich man's house by a gang of thieves. The police caught the thieves and questioned them about the stolen articles. The thieves said that the valuables had been given to them by a fakir.

Searching for the fakir, they came to Baba. They asked him, "Fakir did you give these articles to them?" "Yes," he said. "Wherefrom did you get them?" was the next question. Baba replied: "They have come from the same place from which all things come." "Who gave them to you?" "I gave them to myself."

### **The emergence of the name "Sai Baba"**

Baba gave such intriguing answers, which the police could not understand. "I am the giver of everything. How can anyone get anything without my sanction?" declared Baba. Feeling that it was futile to question him further, the police prepared a report. Baba received a summons from the magistrate to give evidence in the case. Chandhubhai Patel did not want Baba to go to the Magistrate and so arranged for Baba being examined on commission (in Shirdi itself). During the examination on commission, Baba was asked: "What is your father's name?" He replied, "Baba." (Baba means "father" and the reply meant that the father's name was "father").

Q. "What is your religion?"

A. "The religion of God."

Q. "Wherefrom did you come?"

A. "I have come from the *Aatma*."

Q. "What is your caste?"

A. "The caste of the Divine."

Baba answered all the questions in this manner. Earlier he had been hailed as "Sai." In his examination, he had given his father's name as Baba. By the combination of these two names, he was therefore called "Sai Baba." No one knew when and where Sai Baba was born and who gave him that name.

### **Baba as incarnation of Datthaathreya**

Later, many persons began to have doubts about his transcendental powers. One day, the birth anniversary of Datthaathreya was to be celebrated (in the month of Maargasheersha on Panchami day). Several devotees had assembled in Shirdi. Among them was a wealthy man, a great scholar called Kaijack. He is not to be confused with "hijack"! His name was Balwanth Kaijack. As he was approaching the masjid, Baba took a stick and waved it at the devotees, asking them to get

away. He even beat some of them, shouting, "Saithan! Saithan!" No one could understand why Baba was behaving like this. "I am suffering labour pains. Get away, all of you!" he shouted. In those days, Baba not only used to shout at people, but also wield the stick on them on occasions. He used even to throw the stick at fleeing persons. Everyone used to be afraid of him. They all fled from the place.

Some time later, he called all of them to come. "Balwanth Kaijack, come !" he said. When Balwanth came, Baba went inside the masjid. Balwanth went in and found that Baba was not there. He found a three-headed baby on the floor. Baba had declared that he was suffering from labour pains and there was a baby there. The three-headed child appeared to represent Datthaathreya. It was a small baby with a number of hands. Balwanth recognised the child as Datthaathreya and called other devotees to come inside. They went in and on seeing the child closed their eyes. At that instant Baba reappeared there. From that time onwards, people started looking upon Baba as the incarnation of Datthaathreya.

### **Baba's lesson to Muslims**

A controversy arose among the local people as to whether Baba was a Muslim or a Hindu. At one time he used to say: "Allah Malik! Allah Malik!" At other times, he would say "Datthaathreya Malik"! Whenever he shouted "Allah Malik!" Muslims used to come to him in the masjid. His appearance was very much like that of a Muslim. Hence, many Muslims used to come to him. Hindus also used to come and offer incense to him. The Muslims did not approve of what the Hindus were doing. The Hindus did not like the way Muslims revered Baba. Consequently, bitterness developed between the two communities.

One day, Mhalaspathi was sitting near Baba and doing some service to him. Mhalaspathi was the priest in the Khandoba temple. The Muslims, who were opposed to the presence of a Hindu priest near Baba, came with sticks and beat up Mhalaspathi. At every stroke, Mhalaspathi cried out: "Baba!" "Baba!" Each time he shouted the name of Baba, the blow was borne by Baba. Mhalaspathi fell to the ground. Baba came out.

Muslims had great reverence for Baba. Baba roared at the Muslim crowd; "Saithan! On the one side you worship me and on the other you beat me. Is this your devotion?" Baba was bleeding all over the body. The Muslims saw it and asked Baba who had beaten him. "Did you not beat me? Did you not beat me?" said Baba pointing to several men in the crowd. They said: "We did not come near you at all. We only beat Mhalaspathi." "Who is in Mhalaspathi? I am in him," declared Baba. "He has surrendered to me and hence all his troubles are mine."

### **Baba teaches a lesson to all**

On hearing this, the Muslims fell at Baba's feet and craved his forgiveness. Baba then summoned the Hindus and Muslims and told them: "Dear Children, you are all the progeny of one mother." Thereby Baba demonstrated the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. He wanted all differences of caste and creed to be eschewed. What mattered for mankind was the heart.

One who is only concerned about his *matham* (creed) will never discover the Divine (*Madhava*). You must seek the Divine within you. Baba pointed out that all caste and creed distinctions related only to the body. Therefore, you should seek the Supreme in your inner consciousness. Baba, who came to Shirdi with Chandhubhai Patel in 1858, did not leave the place until his passing in 1918. Baba lived for eighty years.

### **How Hemanth Panth wrote the life of Baba**

One day, a pandit came to Baba and said that his biography should be written. His name was Hemanth Panth. He is the author of "Sai Sath Charitha." He entreated Baba to disclose facts about the place of his birth, his parentage, his name and his early life. He could not get any information. Baba did not reveal anything to anyone. But on one occasion, when he was alone with Mhalaspathi, Baba disclosed his date of birth to him. Mhalaspathi was no scholar. He had learnt only a few *manthras* to conduct the *puja* in the temple. He noted down the date of birth on a piece of paper. This came into the hands of Hemanth Panth. With this, he began to write the life of Baba.

No one knows the real truth about Baba. The world knows some facts about his life after his sixteenth year. He was born on September 27, 1838, and attained *Samadhi* on Vijayadasami day in 1918. During his lifetime he taught many sacred things to the people and performed many remarkable deeds. He was worshipped by many devotees. Daada, Naana, Shaama, Abdul Baba, Mhalaspathi, Chandharkar and Dhas Ganu were always with him. Abdul Baba was active till recently. He was a fervent devotee of Baba. In his view it did not matter to what religion one belonged. All were one in their devotion to God.

Kaaka Dixith was a Judge whose son stayed in Brindavan (Whitefield) for twenty years. The latter's wife is now in Brindavan. Kaaka Dixit maintained a diary in which many facts about Baba have been recorded including his statement about when he would pass away.

### **Acquire spiritual bliss through *Thyaaga***

No one can make any affirmations about the nature of the Divine. One's relationship with the Divine is *spiritual--Aatma* to *Aatma*. In this *Kali* or the evil age, however, many become a prey to doubts because of their preoccupation with the physical form. This is because of their being immersed in worldly attitudes derived from their perception of the physical elements. The phenomenal *Prakruthi* (world) is replete with sensory experiences. The spiritual life is based on *Thyaaga* (detachment). Enduring bliss is experienced only when there is sacrifice or detachment.

Man today is not prepared for sacrifice. On the contrary, his desires are insatiable and he is losing all human qualities. The mind is polluted and truth has become a rarity. At every step, man is indulging in wrong doing. Noble thoughts have taken flight. Envy and hatred are rampant. Men should learn to follow the dictates of their heart and act according to the promptings of their conscience. This conscience is related to the universal consciousness.

*Prashanthi Nilayam, first day of Navarathri, 27 Sep 1992*

*Love alone can overcome obstacles, however many and mighty.  
There is no strength more effective than purity, no bliss more  
satisfying than Love, no joy more restoring than Bhakthi, no  
triumph more praiseworthy than surrender.*

*Sathya Sai Baba*