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Ramachandra Ramakrishna Samant, ESQ., B.A., Brahmin, Landlord, 45, Turner Road, Bandra says:

I visited Sai baba thrice during my life time. The first time was at Guru Poornima of 1912 and was in the company of my father-in-law, Annasaheb Dabholkar and my wife. I had not then become a believer in Sai Baba but I went at the insistence of my father-in-law. He had owed to take his daughter and son-in-law to Sai Baba. So I had to go. On my parental side there was no connection with Sai Baba; but there was intense religious fervour. My great grandfather “Bhagat” Lakshman Arjun Samant was a very devout and regular pilgrim of Pandharpur Sree Vithoba. He is ochre coloured Chhati, i.e. sash, his clothes and vessels etc, which he regularly carried at each Ashadi Kartikai are still preserved as heirlooms and I took the ancestral sash to Pandhari, for dipping it into the Chandrabhaga. My grandfather, a bhakta of Vithal was deeply devoted to Shankar also. Every afternoon, he carried on his meditation with concentration and japa of Shankar with Namavali, and I, his grandson, was his pet. Yet, I was not allowed to disturb his prayers. At night, he recited Haripatha and at dawn he had Bhajan. At his death at the age of 59, there was a very memorable scene. He grew virakta and said ‘My close of life has approached vatvel ali ubha pandurang vaikunto Sri Ranga bholavile, i.e. He (referring to Shri Pandurang sitting on a box in white dress) had come to take him to Vaikuntha and that the heavenly visitor had given him one ghatika (i.e.) 24 minutes to take leave. Then he called his sons, daughters, etc. one after another. The ladies (i.e.) his daughters, etc., he did not call by their usual names. One he called Ganga, another he called Bhagirathi. He called them by the names of holy *tirthas* and bade them good-bye. He called my weeping father and asked him to take courage.

Bhavache bhaye kaya mithos landy?

Dhareman Dhairy dhakisi sandi

To me, he gave blessings saying he would protect me as soon as I should think of him and that he was always before and behind me. The words he uttered were words quoted appositely from Tukaram, Ramdas, etc., and not his own words. This was in 1899.

After such talks in highly spiritual view, he peacefully passed away, it is believed, to Vaikuntha. My father was not quite so advanced. He visited Pandharpur and told me that to keep up the family traditions, every member of our family should go to Pandharpur at least once in his lifetime. When he died, he was conscious up to the last moment and as death was approaching, he said pointing to the south "malanyayala ale aheth meyeto" (i.e.) They have come to take me. I am leaving (1911).

I sucked in these holy and purifying ideas and ideals in my early years; but the education I went through tended in quite the opposite direction and was quite powerful enough to deaden and stifle the feelings and sentiments of earlier years. At the time of my marriage (June 1911), I was just beginning to suffer in health (from albuminuria hereditary) and I was on diet (i.e.) at night I would take no solid meal. I had the beginnings of seeds of faith of Sai Baba, having heard grand accounts of his powers. But, my spiritual numbness still continued. I was just prevented from descending to scoffing. I simply ran with the current, or rather went through all that my father-in-law and others went through, merely out of a desire to keep in conformity with my surroundings. Others went and bowed to Baba and I bowed. Baba clearly perceived my mentality and ultimate possibilities and remarked about me in reference to Mr. Madhavarao's bidding me to bow to Baba at that time tyala paya padayala net lagato (i.e.) He requires pressure to be brought to bow at the (Guru's) feet. But that gentle pressure was being very slowly applied. I was also by his kindness made the recipient of favours, the effect of which would also be to increase my faith in him. Baba was informed about my trouble (albuminuria) and my getting weaker on account of inability to take the food that others took in usual quantity and at the the usual times. Baba said that I would get alright. Perhaps, the full words were

The words of Baba came true. I was observing diet and taking medicines now and then for a short time as a precaution and had my regular or periodical urine-examination. Thereafter, the trouble stopped and I resumed my normal food eating.

On 5-6-1913, my first child, a daughter was born (i.e.) about 11 months after my first visit to Baba. It was in 1913 I was appointed to be Chairman of the temple committee to look after Tungareshwar Devasthan at Bassein. At the Guru Poornima of 1915 was my second visit to Baba, as before in company with my wife and father-in-law. There was nothing notable at the visit itself to record. But something that took place in February 1915 may be recorded to show how Sai Bhakti and Sai's protection were going on, at least subconsciously.

In that month on a particular day, I was trying to get up at bedstead; during my convalescence, at my house at Arnala, I suddenly had a fit and fell down. My wife feared that consequences might be serious, and others also were soon drawn to the place. But at that time I had something like a vision. I saw some 8 or 10 dark beings with spears and shields round me accounted in the accepted Yamadoot fashion and I said to myself "What is all this? Why are they beating me?" I did not feel any pain but still I had the feeling that I was being beaten. Simultaneously, there was light and I saw a hand moving on and sweeping aside all those dark beings who should respectfully away from it and there was a portion of a white kaphani (gown) below that hand. Then I woke to full consciousness and picked myself up just as a crowd of persons was gathering round me. I had not sustained any injuries personally by the fall. The only damage done by the fall was that my spectacles fell down and broke. I perceived a peculiar odour at the time of my vision. Of course my relations believed that I was saved by Baba and now I recognise that the hand seen by me was Sai Baba's. This strong faith I had not in 1915 but it came to me in 1927 after seeing how Narayan Maharaj's power worked.

In October, 1918 just a week or ten days before Sai baba passed away, we went up and took his darshan. I had taken two little sons along with other members of the family

and while there they had diarrhoea. In other places, one would make them fast or give them light liquid nutrition; but here at Shirdi, Baba was asked about them, and he said "Feed them on sweetened semolina (boiled with ghee). They ate that and got alright in a week. I know personally that my father-in-law, when ill, was, by Baba's order, fed on food which ordinary rules of prudence would avoid in cases of illness. But obedience to Baba's orders did not result in any harm.

It was in 1918 that Baba first asked me for dakshina and that several times I gave him such sum as he asked for. He did not compel me thereby to borrow for that purpose a course which I would not like at the place. He stopped asking me before my pocket money was exhausted. Another fact I noticed about these demands was that whenever he asked me for money, I was then having in my mind feelings of distrust in spirituality. I did not then pause to reflect, if the figures mentioned in his demand (viz) 25, 15, 10 had any allegorical meaning or were allusions. On some occasions he told me, "Go and sit in the Wada". I literally carried out his bidding by going to Mr. Buty's building where we stayed and sat by my father-in-law. Long afterwards, I was told that the words meant "Go and listen to the purana that is being read in the Wada". I will narrate next when my faith in Sai Baba came up to its present pitch of belief that Sai Baba is both man and

God and that divine powers and divine nature were part and parcel of Sai Baba.

One of my sons began to be seriously ill in August 1926. It had a very protracted course and during its course diverse diagnosis were put forward and diverse treatments adopted by eminent doctors. But, after all efforts, there was no improvement. Things seemed to point in October 1927 that it was a hopeless case. I had given up hope. Then my sister-in-law said that we should take the child to Narayan Maharaj of Khedgaonpet. That was done, Maharaj said "He will get alright, take this tirtha". That was the turning point. The same doctor with altered treatment continued; but the child began to improve and in 6 months' time all danger was passed. Later, he picked up more health and strength and that boy is alright. That turn that came with the words of Maharaj convinced me that it is absurd to put satpurush like

Sai and Narayan Maharaj on the same level with other human beings, whose words had no power, and that the former were justly placed on a rough pedestal of their own that may be described as the "human and divine". "Thou art human and divine"- In Memoriam (Tennyson).

From 1930, I got more phenomena about saints. In that Tungareshwar temple, there was a saint Naga Bua. He was ganja smoker. In 1930 he passed away at Tungareshwar. That very night at 11-30 p.m., I was half dozing in my room at Bandra when suddenly I was getting choked as it were, with the smell of smoke that entered my nose, throat, etc. I got up and finding only my wife in the room asked her "Are you smoking?" Of course she never did. She asked me "What is it you are saying?" I felt the force of her remark, but I was still feeling the smoke strong in my nose and wondered how that smoke had got into my room. But she did not smell it.

Next morning as I was motoring in a village, accidentally, the then chairman of that temple committee turned up and stopped my car and told me that about 2 a.m. during that night, the Naga Bua had died and asked me what arrangements should be made for disposal of the remains. So about the time of his departure that saint had gone over to my room. When my friend told me of the death, I recognised the smoke and smell I had in my room as that of Naga Bua.

In 1918, when Sai Baba came in my dream and swept away the dark beings, I perceived a peculiar odour, which I have learned to identify with Sai Baba.

Baba had spoken a little regarding my past births etc. To Nana Saheb Nimonkar in my presence although I could not distinctly hear it; but the latter died before I could ask him as to details.

