

Four

Worship

Worship is discussed and its need or validity is questioned by several, and hence a few words about worship in general and Sai worship in particular are called for at this stage.

Worship is not usually the result of logical discussion and analysis, but is at the initial stage usually the result of an intuitive impulse arising out of a fear, a need, or other impulse. Some terrible power confronts us. Then we bow down in fear. Some terrible calamity overwhelms us. Then we yearn and look out for some help from some powerful personage that can overcome the calamity. Some terrible and oppressive need arises, such as ravenous hunger or serious illness or discomfort. Then again we look to a higher power for relief. It is an intuitive impulse in all these cases that leads man to worship, which is an emotional act. Later, comes the reflective stage and religious conduct is based on reason. Then, the question arises 'Why does man worship a higher power?' The obvious answer is, it is the feeling that a higher Power can give and will be induced to give man what he needs and save him from trouble. This is true whether the Power is an invisible God or a visible man or image. There must be in the first

place power and willingness to use the power in the object worshipped, and as a counterpart, there must be a need, a fear, or other stimulus operating upon the worshipper to make him believe in the power and willingness of that power to render help. The stimuli are of various sorts, for example, *Arti* or trouble, need for some objects and a desire to understand this mysterious and puzzling universe and one's relations to it. Of these, the *Arti* is the commonest stimulus. It is the sufferer, *Arta*, who turns to God or to a saint or to a spirit—not the contented and happy man spending his time quite easily and with joy. If, in the last case, a man is given to philosophising or investigating on a basis of curiosity to understand himself and things about him such a person is named *Jijnasu* - he may turn to God and pray for divine aid to understand. But such people are few. The question is further raised whether any object at all should be worshipped and mostly this question is raised by persons who have neither any trouble nor need nor other stimulus mentioned above nor any spirit of solemn enquiry nor any higher impulse or sensitivity. It is only in cases of persons with hard and unattached hearts that a question as to the justification for worship and next the justification for choosing the particular object of worship is raised. This class of questioners may for the present be omitted, and our discussion here may be confined to those who have some spirit of worship in them and who raise the question about what objects ought to be worshipped. Amongst the Hindus there is a wide range of worship. The all pervading nature of God enables the ardent Hindu mystic to perceive him in any and every object and to worship him in that object. Local heroes and saints with superhuman powers and *Daivi sampath* or *Vibhuti-that*. is, divine qualities in abundance naturally get worshipped in many places. According to the doctrine of *Bhakti*, it is the spirit and faith with which an object is worshipped that matter, not the object itself and hence the objects without *Vibhuti* also can be and are worshipped. According to higher systems of thought, every object in the Universe is a manifestation of God, and therefore might be or ought to be worshipped.

The Upanishads refer to both sets of cases, and the Gita, which is the gift of the Upanishads, justifies both sets. In Chapter VII of the Gita, Lord Krishna

says that one does not know and realise God unless one knows and realises Him in everything, in the Universe, that is,

The *Para prakriti* which is manifest as the Universe and which includes the five elements *Pancha bhutas*, namely Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether and *Manas, Buddhi and Ahamkar* as well as.

The *Aparaprakriti* or *Mulaprakriti*, the substratum of all. The *Para* and *Apara* put together constitute God. One ought to worship God in all aspects⁴⁴, following which all objects in the Universe are viewed as God. There is in the Upanishads no shying at worship of any objects. Following nature, the Upanishads recommend the worship of the mother, the father, the teacher and the guest. *Matru Devo Bhava, Pitru Devo Bhava*. Then come *Acharya Devo Bhava and Atithi Devo Bhava*. About *Acharya Devo Bhava* we shall have to consider in great detail many a question, and, therefore, a special chapter must be devoted to it. At present we shall only note that the father, the mother and the teacher naturally evoke great respect, and a child has to depend upon them and is at their mercy. Therefore, it naturally looks with feelings of adoration to all these just as Baba looked at his foster father, the *Fakir* as God and *Guru*. The Upanishads recognise the fact that human nature turns to see and feel God. God is the name for the Father of All; who looks after all his children through the mother and father, its procreators; and to the *Acharya Deva* who develops its mental body in understanding and wisdom. Even ordinary *Gurus* and parents without special powers are worshipped. But if any particular *Guru* happens to be possessed of noble virtues or of *siddhis*, superhuman or extraordinary powers, then he is worshipped more naturally and readily not only by the mass but by the intelligentia and the critics.

In the case of Sai Baba, his perfect purity, asceticism, general benevolence, harmlessness, non attachment, and other virtues evoked the respect of the saints, Devadas, Janakidas, Gangagir, Anandanath and Bidkar, that met him, and also of serious and noble minded men like Mahlsapathy and his friends Appa Bhil and Tukaram Darji. His nature is well described as unattached and happily roaming about fearlessly and as a help to those in

suffering and misery⁴⁵. So Mahlsapathy and his friends regarded Baba as a saint, an *Acharya* or *Guru Deva*, long before he exhibited any *siddhi* power. However, so far as the general mass was concerned, it was the fact that he turned water into oil that provoked worship. And the worship took the usual form of offering flowers, fruits and scents. Baba protested and tried to dissuade these worshippers. He asked them to go to their customary objects of worship such as the images they had in their temples and homes. But they would not listen. They felt that he was a saint, a *samartha* saint. The learned could quote Tukaram's *Sant toch dev. Dev loch sant* that is, Saints are God. God is saints. The Villages told him "You are a *Bolte Chalte Dev*", that is, a talking and walking God. The persistence of the mass idea that his *siddhis* were evidence of divine power, and therefore marked him out as a *Guru Deva* for worship, could not be combated or resisted. Sri Upasani Baba put it in these words,

Aneka Asruta Atarkya Leelavitasaih
Samavishkrita Isana BhasvatPrabhavam
Ahambhava Hinam,Prasanna Atmabhavam
Namami Iswaram Sadgurum Sainatharri*.

this means, I bow to Sainath, the *Sadguru*, who reveals his divine nature through numerous unheard of and inscrutable lilas, who is free from egotism and has attained Self-Realisation". So, alike in the case of the highly learned *pandit*, Sri Upasani Baba, as in the case of the uneducated rustics, the ladies of Shirdi, the *chamatkars* or *lilas* are the first prompters to worship Sai as a manifestation of divinity. That is how worship begins⁴⁷ and grows. Gradually as we shall fully explain later it leads the worshipper higher and higher so that he understands his own self and the Supreme self more and more until the *Jiva* is absorbed in the *Paramatma*. There is a considerable distance of time, stages, and a vast amount of effort between the beginning of worship and the highest achievement, and Baba worship had and has all stages in it, and all sorts of worshippers. Baba who first objected to his worshsip, did by his own *Antarjnana* or prophetic vision foreseeing what was to follow, namely, not only individual benefits to millions but also national benefit and ultimately benefit to

the cause of religion itself for the sake of humanity. That is why he gradually promoted and then developed his worship, in spite of numerous obstacles. The obstacles arose from all sides-the Hindus and the Muslims. Naturally Muslims objected to the worship by Hindus of a human figure like Sai Baba within the Mosque with the application of sandal paste to his forehead and to the accompaniment of much din and bustle through music and in other ways. From mere protest the obstacles mounted higher as we already noted to a threat of force for stopping worship. But Baba's wonderful power and foresight overcame all these obstacles. Individual worship of Baba attracted larger and larger numbers from the immediate neighbourhood and from distant places and this developed into congregational worship, and that again from simple congregational worship to the highly complicated forms which are seen in famous places of worship like Pandharpur. All the *shodasca upacharas* and the *Raja upacharas* were brought in by the increasing volume of *bhaktas* and tended to the wider and deeper expansion of Sai worship. Gradually everything that goes on in sacred places of worship like Pandarpur and Tirupati were developed for Baba worship at Shirdi including ritual, hymnology, music, processions, cars, palanquin horse and *pujaris*. We shall now proceed to set out in full this later development of Baba worship which began about or after 1908. But we shall first notice the important part that obstacles play in the march of this as of other great movements.

Obstacles to worship arose from various viewpoints and served several purposes-one of which was to gain time to build up sufficient strength to capture all for the mission of Baba. The first obstacle might be from the modesty of Baba himself as a *fakir* who welcomed poverty and obscurity in a nook or corner of Kopergaon which means a corner *taluk* of the Ahmednagar District. Baba's whole heart was engrossed in contemplation of his *Guru* whom he always called *Fakir*⁴⁹, and in the bliss attending that contemplation, thoughts of food and rest did seldom trouble him.

Prana Vrittyaiva Santushyet'

Munir Naivendriya Priyaih

Jnanam Yatha Na Nascyeta

Navakiryeta Vangmanah II⁴⁹

that is, The sage should be contented to get just what would keep body and soul together and see that his powers of knowing, speech and wisdom may not perish.

Kvachitchannah Kvachit Spashtah

UpasyahScreya Ichchatam

Bhungle Sarvatra Datnmam

Dahan Praguttara Ascubham //so

that is, The *Muni*, sometimes concealing his nature and attainments and sometimes revealing them is approached and worshipped by those desirous of achieving their highest well being and eats everywhere the food given by donors and thereby burns up their past evil *Karma* and subsequent evil *Karma* also.

Grasam Sumrushtam Virasam

Mahanlam Stokam,

Eva Va Yadruchchayaiva

Apatitam Graset Ajagaro Akriyah II

this means, Whether food be tasty or tasteless, plenty, or scanty, the sage, following the python's example should just take what comes of itself without any exertion on his pan.

Samruddha Kama Hino Va

Narayana Paro Munih

Na Utsarpeta Na Scushyeta

Saridbhih Iva Sagarah IP-

this means, Whether he has plenty of comforts or none, as his heart is set on *Narayana* alone, he neither overflows nor shrinks, just as the ocean does not overflow when the rivers throw their floods into it, nor shrink when the rivers do not.

These verses aptly describe Sai Baba's condition and mentality. People could therefore see in him a *Parama Bhagavata*. Thus the serious minded and noble set was easily drawn to worship him despite obstacles.

At first his nomadic habits of running hither and thither as fancy drew him showed that comfort of the body and care for the good opinion of the society in which he moved did not bulk largely in his view. The Bhagavata says,

*Atmaramo Anaya Vritya Vicharet Jadavat Mutnih*⁵³

that is, Immersed in God or himself, the sage rambles like an idiot.

Bayyaji Bai had to trace him amongst the jungles or treefoots that he frequented, to give him his meal. As for fame, he knew full well that many people thought him to be mad or foolish and insulted him calling him *Pagal* or treated him as a totally negligible factor. But he had no vanity or *amor propre* to be wounded by such lack of regard. He was like the *Bhikshu* in the Bhikshu Gita⁵⁴, who was subjected to indignities or insults and bore up with all silently as part of his *Karma*.

Evam Sa Bhowtikam Duhkam

Daivikam Daihikam Cha Yat

Bhoktavyam Atmano Dishtam

Praptam Praptam Abudtiyala Il

that is, Whether due to his body or animals or gods, the *Tapatraya*, all that befell him, he deemed to be his *Karma* and bore them unruffled.

On the other hand when people began to show him great regard and wanted to worship him, he wished to avoid it in the interests of his own peaceful and quiet life. His happiness was complete in itself and did not require offerings of *naivedyas*, of praise, of camphor lights, and the assembling of crowds round him. Thus the first obstacle was from Baba himself. But Baba was divinely gifted and had important objects to achieve in his life which formed his mission. When in 1886, exercising his wonderful power or *Siddhi of Swechcha Marana* dying at will he left the body and returned to it after three days, he evidently confirmed the idea that there was a mission for him to fulfil to benefit thousands, if not tens of thousands of people, connected with him, directly or remotely, through *rinanubandha* and the very society or population of India amongst whom he was born and was living. He felt probably that he could do something for the uplift of humanity also. These put together may constitute his mission and evidently it is for the fulfillment of that mission, which he might be slowly realising

and working out as we shall explain later on, that he returned to his body in 1886, But even before 1886 he would surely have perceived that his mission in some form existed for him. So, he might have gradually endured, encouraged and fully developed the worship offered to him in the above view, that is, to carry out his mission. But we must not anticipate. A separate Chapter must be devoted to the subject of Baba's Mission.