

Success Begets Success

The benefits attending such worship were quickly seen and hence numbers from outside the village, that is, from the immediate neighbourhood were drawn to the worship. This spread gradually from place to place and people from even remote parts were attracted to the worship. As for the details of worship, it is not necessary to mention how Baba objected to sandal paste being applied to his forehead though no objection was raised to its application to his feet by any one except Mahlsapathy and how ultimately he acquiesced in every one applying sandal paste to his forehead also⁵⁵. Individual worship itself was first not systematic nor organised. But K.G. Bhishma, a good *Kirtankar* and a great adherent of Vittal worship at Pandharpur, drew up the ritual for Sai Baba worship on practically the same lines as the Pandharpur worship, and he brought a set of *artis* that is ritualistic; verses for use by individuals at Shirdi, and these were sent up by Baba to Nana Saheb Chandorkar at Jamnere and were approved of by him. They were largely in use and tended to develop the worship of Baba on the customary lines of worship in well known temples, The next step was from individual worship to congregational worship. It was in 1908 that the change was started. Congregational worship implied that there would be some one to officiate as the *pujari* and that he would be available at various periods of worship namely Matins, vespers, night *artis* and noon *artis*. For this purpose, Hari Vinayak Sathe, a Settlement Officer, who in 1905 was blessed by Baba with the promise of a son in case he married, and who got married in consequence, sent up one Meghashyam called Megha to Shirdi so that he might officiate as the *pujari* and carry on congregational worship. But that man was an extremely dull

and rustic Brahmin having hardly any learning either in Hindu sacred literature or in any other literature. He heard that Sai Baba was a Muslim, and he requested Mr. Sathe not to send him up to worship a Mohammadan. He was a Siva worshipper, a staunch Hindu, and might worship Datta but not a Muslim. Sathe told him that Baba was God, and, therefore, he might worship him. So under pressure from Sathe, the man arrived at Shirdi and was taken by Shama to Baba. Baba, reading his mentality completely, shouted against him at his first approach and said, Why does that fool of a Saheb send this idiot to me? So saying he drove Megha away, because he would consider it demeaning to worship Baba. Megha being a Siva worshipper was attracted to *Triambak* a sacred place for Siva, 18 miles away from Nasik, and tried to spend his time there. But there he fell ill, and remembered his refusal to worship Baba. He thought that might be the reason why he had his illness. Having learnt about Baba's greatness, he returned to Baba, this time more humble. By Baba's grace he regained his health and started early in 1909 the congregational worship. He was fully convinced that Baba was Siva, the same as the Siva at *Triambak*. He was determined to worship him with Ganga, that is, Godavari water and *bilva* leaves. So, he usually went out five miles to fetch Godavari water for the daily worship, and three or four miles to fetch *bel* leaves which are said to be specially appropriate for Siva worship, *Eka Bilvam Sivarpanam* that is one *bel* leaf even is sufficient offering to Siva. When even the very orthodox Megha thus became an ardent devotee of Baba, others followed suit and sooner or later gave up their prejudices against Baba and joined in the congregational worship. All this required time; and obstacles like Megha's sentiments, had to be overcome and made stepping stones for further progress.

To make the congregational worship more advanced and attractive, there was an enthusiastic set gathering at Shirdi. One Ramakrishna Ayi, a young widow of the family name of Sahasrabuddhe, came and established herself as a devotee of Baba, and being highly accomplished, was intent upon using all her gifts and cleverness for developing Sai Baba's worship. She drew a large number of people to herself and made them more enthusiastic in the cause of Sai

worship. She made them carry out her plan of fitting out Baba and his *chavadi* in exactly the same way as these would be fitted out if Baba was a real *Maharaja* and a real God's image. The 16 *shodascaupacharas* common to all Hindu worship and the *Raja Upachars* add pomp to worship in temples and *mutts* *Raja Upacharas* means treating the object of worship as a *Maharaja*. They add to the impressiveness of the ceremony and the religious effect on the mind of those who attend that worship. They also increase the extent of worshippers. Thus, Ramakrishna Ayi introduced silver whisks, silver maces, silver umbrellas, silver candelabras, moons, and artificial gardens to deck the *chavadi* where Baba was worshipped on alternate nights. A car, a palanquin with silver appurtenances, a horse, and other regal paraphernalia were furnished on her insistence and the insistence of other devotees to make Baba worship run exactly like *Vittal* worship or the worship of great *Acharyas* in their *mutts*. This, by itself, would be impressive. But Baba fell into the humour of the devotees. They wanted to make him and called him always a *Maharaja*, and he was determined that he should be a *Maharaja* to satisfy the devotees. What are specially wanted in a *Maharaja's durbar* were valuable presents in cash and kind and to various people visiting the *durbar*, the hope of obtaining those presents. *Pandits*, acrobats, *nautch* girls, wrestlers, *kirtankars* and musicians, who flock to regal *darbars* visited Shirdi Sai *Maharaja's durbar* also. Sai Baba, therefore, arranged for funds to pay them all. Moreover, there were those depending upon his favour to get wealth which, on the principle of *rinanubandha*, he wished to shower upon them, such as Tatya Patel, Lakshmi Bai, Bade Baba and Ramachandra Patel. So Baba's *durbar* had need to get an income and Baba began from 1908 to ask for *dakshinas*. Formerly, he would refuse offer of rupees to him saying that he had no need for them⁵⁶. But from the time that this new tide began, he began to ask his visitors for payments of large sums. Some he would ask for Rs.5, some for Rs.25, and some others for Rs.250. Almost every one that he asked would pay. Baba knew the minds and state of the Purse of all the persons and could get exactly what he wanted, and he would not ask for any funds except where he was going to recompense or where the visitor had already been blessed by *Dana* or *Vittal* and

was bound to pay⁵⁷ whom or those God pointed out. Many sent "vowed Sums" of their own accord. For example one paid Rs.6,000. Therefore, Baba easily succeeded in getting as *dakshinas* in the course of each day varying sums that totalled up in the evening sometimes to Rs.300 and sometimes to thousands. The total income came up to a Provincial Governor's income on which the authorities tried to levy Income-tax. But Baba himself retained, nothing at all, as every evening he would dispose of the day's accumulations. But the Income-tax authorities were able to levy tax upon the regular recipients of Baba's daily doles such as Bade Baba and Tatya Patil. Thus Baba had a steady and large income from which he was making very liberal presents to *Ramadasis*, other *dasis*, acrobats, *pandits*, and various people who came to him from distant places, for example Madras and Punjab like Addullah Jan who. hoped Baba would provide funds for *Haj*. In addition to the large crowd of persons who offered *naivedyas* of eatables to Baba, it was possible for 200 beggars to be fed everyday by Baba's bounty and doles. Thus the appearance of a very prosperous *darbar* was presented at Shirdi from 1909 up to 1918. All this pomp Baba despised. Profusion of wealth also could never captivate him but he could use it without, being tainted⁵⁸. It served a purpose, namely, the widening of Baba worship, which had a great purpose behind it. That is why Baba allowed all this to develop his worship.

As Baba's having wealth and a royal *darbar* was misunderstood by some, we are obliged to stress again the following facts that prove that Baba was a *Janaka Maharaja* and continued to be a Divine *Samartha Sadguru* carrying on the noble work referred to already.

Baba had no attachment and so could handle wealth and make it run into and out of his hands without danger of being tainted. He was a perfectly realised soul in the perfect *laya* stage as disclosed by his words *Main Allahum* that is *Aham Brahmasmi*. For such a person, Srimad Bhagavata says, danger of attachment does not arise. Baba told the *sadhu Devadas*⁵⁹ that *fakirs* and hermits must avoid the *upadhis*, namely, *Moha* and pomp. But in Baba's case, at the latter end of his life, pomp was thrust upon him and had a useful purpose to

serve. Till then Baba avoided pomp. He would not even sit on a chair or lie on a cot, but sat and slept upon a sack cloth or gunny mattress placed on the floor. He would not put on his head the crown or regal dress when the devotees wanting him to look like a *Maharaja*, brought these for him. Nor would he accept or allow other royal insignia upon his person. When a silver-plated palanquin was brought to him with its small silver horses as appurtenances, he refused to receive it, and said that he did not want to sit in it. The devotees then said that he need not sit in it, but that his picture would be placed in it, and that it will be used for the procession. Even then he would not allow the palanquin into the *Dwarakamayee*, and so they had to leave . the palanquin in the open yard in front of his Mosque. At night some of the silver horses were stolen. The devotees noting it were very sad, and came to complain of it to Baba. But Baba asked them, "I say, why was not the whole palanquin stolen?" That is, to Baba it was a matter of utter indifference whether palanquins or silver articles or any other things were provided or not provided, were stolen or remained safe. He lived as a true *sanyasi* up to the end of his life on *Bhiksha* food. Of course, it is well known that when people go out for begging bread, all sorts of things, insipid, or even partly rotten, are given as *Bhiksha* especially to beggars. In the case of Baba, who enjoyed more respect than beggars, rotten things would not be showered on him, but many people, who were content to eat rather ill cooked and tasteless or insipid food, would bestow part of their stuff upon Baba also.

Yad annah purush bhavati,

tadannah tasya devatah

that is, what we eat, we give to God. That is why the hermit is directed in Uddhava Gita⁶

Stokam Stokam Graset Grasam

Deho Varteta Yavata

Grihan ahimsan Atishtet

Vrittim Madhukarim Munih

this means, the sage should observe the *Madhukari* system in begging for food. He must take little doles from several houses, without taxing them too much. He must take only what is absolutely needed to keep body and soul together.

Baba did not hate or fear poverty. But on the other hand he was content with it and esteemed it. He said '*Fakir Aval padsha*' that is, 'The *Fakir* is the real Emperor', because he can lead a life free from care and anxiety. So Baba had no possessions, and all these regal paraphernalia mentioned above were kept with Ayi, and on her death, were held by an association, and finally vested in the Sai Sansthan, formed by the order of the Ahmednagar District Court in the year 1922.

When Baba left the body, he had only Rs.16 in his hand and no other property. Hence the *Raja upacharas*, which would have puffed up or affected other persons, did not affect him. In refusing to own properties or have a palace, he set an excellent example. If all *sadhus* had followed his example, there would not be so much of scandal against *sadhus* and so much of wreck in *sadhus'* lives that we notice. Baba followed the direction of the *sastras* for hermits and *fakirs* that a hermit should not put by anything for the morrow. Srimad Bhagavata⁶¹ says,

Sayantanam Scwastanam Va

Na Sangrinhita Bhikshitam

Pani Patro Udharamatro

Makshika Iva Na Sangrahi II

This means, The sage should not store what he obtains by begging for the evening or keep it for the next day. His vessels for receiving alms must be either the hand or the stomach. He should not hoard things like the bee. The 12th verse adds, If he does, like the bee he will be killed. Spiritual persons who store, develop attachment or *Moha*, which means death of the soul. Baba had also no necessity for delicacies. He had thoroughly conquered his palate. Srimad Bhagavata⁶² says,

Jitam Sarvam Jite Rase

that is, When the palate is conquered, everything is controlled. Baba was a perfect *Jitendriya*. His *dhriti* or self control included conquest of the urges of hunger and sex as directed in Srimad Bhagavata⁶³,

Jihvopastha jayo Dhrutih

that is, *Dhruti* means perfect control over the palate and the sex urge.