

Nature and functions of Baba

When discussing the personality we found it a very nebulous though familiar term used about both saints and ordinary persons. When we talk of nature, that is, nature of particular beings, we appear to have something more definite than when talking of personalities. But the difference is rather elusive and nominal than real. The word nature is very broad and is applied not merely to personalities, human or other, but also to everything else in the Universe. We talk of the nature of the elements, of various entities and objects dealt with in the material sciences, for example the nature of hydrochloric acid or of sulphuric acid or of oxygen, when what we really mean is the way in which they act in matters of chemical combination, and we talk of the nature of our judgements. Anyhow nature is applied to inanimate objects and abstractions. We shall now exclude the vegetable kingdom and even the animal kingdom. Monkeys, cats, birds, have their nature but we are just now concerned with the nature of higher beings namely, men, angels, and God or gods. *Satpurushas*, that is powerful God Realisers, for instance, are said to have a particular nature. Here we notice the constant confusion between power, modes of action due to power, and nature of a being. Power is not the supreme feature in nature, though part of it, that is, though nature might largely depend upon the possession or absence of power, power is the first item we think of when talking of *siddhas*, for instance. But from the bare possession of power, the nature of all *siddhas* cannot be determined, as power may be used for good, evil or indifferent purposes. But a *Samartha Sadguru*, who is a *Satpurusha* undertaking the duties of a *Sadguru* is not merely clothed with power but with other attributes and functions, and the nature of a *Samartha Sadguru* can be and must be discussed in dealing with a life of a

saint like Sai Baba who was undoubtedly a *Samartha Sadguru*. The nature of angels, of gods and goddesses, is constantly mentioned in Hindu religious literature, and resembles the nature of saints. Nature depends upon power first, upon position or relation to other entities next, and thirdly upon the attitude of any particular self towards the surroundings, in which term surroundings we have to include God also. The nature of men in general has been discussed in books of Ethics, Theology, Sociology, Anthropology and Biology. On the basis of general humanity, one might begin to form an idea of the basis of a particular species of human beings known as saints and amongst them, a further subdivision known as *Samartha Sadgurus* like Sai Baba.

Nature refers to the way in which a particular being acts and is understood by others. Kindness, cruelty, serviceability, tolerance and sympathy are said to be parts of nature, and these refer to the relations between a self and its surroundings. In the case of saints, the relation is generally that of a beneficent superior entity dealing with inferiors that may crave contact with a view to protection. In developing one's contact with externals, it is not merely one's nature that decides but also function. Any entity along with others forms part of a joint whole or a system, and functions are assigned by Providence to each part. So the saint has some functions to fulfil in society and the question what these functions are naturally arises. These functions are closely connected with and in fact dependent upon the nature of the saint, and his surroundings and as a rule the greater the power, the greater and wider the responsibilities and functions.

So far we have been dealing with general statements, but what is more important to us here is the application of these general statements to our particular case, namely, Sai Baba. The question is asked, What was and what is Baba's nature? People considered that he had one nature, when he was in the flesh, and now that he has passed away from the flesh, he has another nature. Let us first take for consideration the nature of Baba as understood by those who came in contact with him when in the flesh, that is before his *Mahasamadhi*. Here there is a puzzle, persons with a crude understanding took him to be a mere

man, an odd *fakir*. See what happened to Sri Krishna. He says in the Bhagavad Gita,

Na mam Dushkritino Mudhah
Prapdyante Narathamah
Mayaya apahritajnanah
Asuram bhavam ascritah II³⁰³

Here it is pointed out that men following evil courses are obviously fools with an *Asuric* nature. They can neither understand divinity in Krishna nor surrender to him. Their *Maya* is too strong for any clear vision.

Avyaktam Vyaktim apannam
Manyante maam abuddhayah
Param Bhavam ajanantah
mama avyayam anuttamam²⁰⁴

It is explained that they can only take superficial views and can see in Krishna merely a human personality and cannot dive within to see that He is the unborn and unique *Para Brahman*.

Na aham prakasah sarvasya
Yogamaya samavritah
Mudho ayam na abijanati
Loko maam Ajam avyayam²⁰⁵

The same is stressed here. *Maya* of God, by which the Krishna form was taken is a screen, the mass can not see through. They cannot know Him as the Unborn and Undying, that is the Supreme beyond birth and death²⁰⁶.

It is in Bhagavad Gita²⁰⁷ that mention is made as to who can know Sri Krishna to be the Supreme. It is the refined lofty souls, of *Daivi Prakriti*, that is divine nature as fully described in Bhagavad Gita²⁰⁸.

Avajananti maam mudhah Manushim Tanumasritam
Param Bhavam ajanantah mama Bhuta maheswaram²⁰⁶

Sri Krishna says,

Mahatmanas tu maam Partha
Daivim Prakriti masritah

Bhaajanti ananya Manasaa

Jnatvaa Bhutadim Avyayam II ²⁰⁷

that is, That the deluded persons treat him as a mere man, because *Param Bhavam Ajantah*, they were ignorant of his real essence and his identity with the Supreme Self or *Paramatma*, and²⁰⁷, that great souls recognise him as the Imperishable Source of All and worship Him solely fixed on Him, and that is due to their *Daivi Prakriti* that is godly nature. What happened to Sri Krishna is what happened to Sri Sai Baba also. The vast mass took him to be a mere man, a begging *fakir* who was putting up in the Shirdi Mosque. And his nature was deduced from the premise that he was a beggar intent on getting his food and was wasting his time doing nothing useful to anybody. This was the exact opposite of the truth. But the mass did not know the truth at first. Others more refined and sensitive who came into closer contact and had eyes to see the truth were the hermits like Devdas who noticed that Baba was a saint of rare merit. Persons like Ganga Gir Bua of *Punthamba* treated Baba as something very precious, a gem without expressing in what way he was precious. Good souls like Mahlsapathy began to perceive the high moral and spiritual position that Baba occupied through his perfect selfless acts, his equal minded beneficence and freedom from ordinary reactions like greed and anger, and began to serve him and wait on him. Other classes of persons came to him finding that he had certain powers of discovering the truth, that is powers like clairvoyance, clairauidience, television, omnivision, knowledge of the past and future and wished to benefit thereby. Each of these understood his nature differently from others. The biographer of Sai Baba has to give a gist of a fairly correct understanding of Baba's nature by all these classes.

The first point, the point of greatest interest and importance in the history of Sri Sai Baba is the mass view point, that is of the impulsive, unsophisticated souls who learnt of his excellence and powers, began to worship him as God, and placed utter and absolute reliance upon him for all their needs. These expressly declared him to be God and would not brook contradiction of that view either by Baba or by anyone else. A Bandra youth was asked by Baba to attend a *pothi*

scripture study class where saints were discussed and dissected and some were declared to have a few definite powers which, however, would not make them God. That youth was greatly disgusted and went to Baba and complained that the *pothi* readers were defaming Baba by saying that he was not God. Baba then said, What is the harm in that? I am only a *fakir*. I am not God. Who can compare with God? The question or simple issue therefore arises Whether Baba was God or not. Many acting upon the rules of procedure or Law of evidence would say that an admission by Baba that he was not God, being an admission against one's own interest is conclusive proof against him that he was not God. But the Bandra youth was not a lawyer of that description. He waited awhile, and suddenly Baba blurted out when talking to some one thanking him, for the marvellous rescue from a very serious crisis or accident, 'What am I to do? I spread four, four hands at a time to save my devotees. I will not allow any harm to befall them'. The youth at once said, 'Baba just now you said that you were only a *fakir*. How can you have four hands?' Baba gave him a smile of approval. Four hands is typical of Godhead. The youth, therefore, was more firmly convinced than ever from this admission of Baba that he had four hands and therefore he was God. Godhead is not easy to define. So when the question is put point blank, 'Is Baba God or not God' the answers are quick, varied and depend upon the answerer's stock of information, attitude towards life, and contact with higher beings including saints, angels, and gods. For our purpose, we may take it that when a person is worshipped with the fullest feeling that God is in him or that he is God and when benefits ensue as they should, the procedure is obviously right. Baba has stood this test for scores of years and on innumerable occasions and to use a very expressive but vulgar argument, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Baba must be treated as God, for by treating him so, persons found and find that they derived and derive adequate benefit, the same benefit as they would derive by worshipping God. This is sufficient proof that Baba was and is God. Many acted and act on that faith. A vast number have acted on this faith and derived confirmatory experience during his life time and are acting now also, that is proof. Myriads affirmed and reaffirm, Baba was God

and Baba is God. This is the unmistakable position, and yet what are we to do with the other statement made by Baba that he is not God? Baba made a very similar statement when one Mr. G.S. Curtis, Revenue Commissioner of Bombay, wanted to do Shirdi and do Baba, just as people do Rome and do the Pope because Shirdi and Baba had got well known to the public by that time in 1917. Baba expressed utter contempt and said, Why do these rascals come? I am only an ordinary human being with normal limbs and organs. Baba said, 'What is there to see in me? I am only a *fakir*'. Here Baba was referring to the attitude of Mr. Curtis and his set who thought only of Baba's and Shirdi's external appearance and that he was something like a Lion in the Zoo to be seen out of curiosity. Baba was not a monster or a fit subject for idle curiosity. There was nothing special to be seen in him with the ordinary eyes. The special features of Baba should be seen not with the ordinary eyes but with the eye of devotion and love. Seen with ordinary eyes, Baba was a man and a poor *fakir* living in a dilapidated Mosque, but seen with the eye of devotion, Baba was God or a guardian Angel.

Soda Sannihitam Gudham,

bhaktya maam drakshyate Bhavan

that is, the eye of devotion will see him as an unseen but ever near guardian of the *ankita* devotee.

It is exactly the same with God in other forms and other names also. Take for instance Tirupati Venkatesa which is but a localised and particular form of the Supreme. A person who goes to Tirupati and sees the holy image with the eye of geologist absolutely without any touch of devotion, would only note the species of rock to which the Tirupati Venkatesa image would belong, and would certainly deny that there is any God in that stone. But to the mass of highly devout persons who pour out their souls in love and devotion to Tirupati Venkatesa in the presence of that image, Venkatesa is not a stone at all. The stone is wholly forgotten. Venkatesa is God, the fullest embodiment of mercy and love ever anxious and ever ready to help His devotee and this alone is the true devotee's

feeling. It is not sanctified images alone that thus serve as symbols of the Divine. Saints also are such symbols.

God is not one of the terms found in the material sciences and is not capable of exact definition. It is a term used by persons dealing with emotion and unseen entities and acting in ways which are not the ways of material science. Hence whether anything is or not God, cannot be demonstrated scientifically to the satisfaction of anyone who insists upon satisfaction on the lines of science and logic. But for practical purposes, the term God has a definite meaning and for purpose of this, we must depend upon the reader's popular idea of God. On that basis we proceed. Subtle distinctions as to whether a person with a few powers, usually termed divine powers or *siddhis*, is to be treated as God or not, we shall avoid. In the Bhagavad Gita²⁰⁹, Sri Krishna recounts various embodiments of power or greatness which signify Godhead to the worshipper and which may be used by him for purposes of meditation and worship. But Gita also adds that every soul is a fraction of the Primordial force called God, that is an *Amsa* of God

Mamai vamso Jivaloke Jivabhutah Sanatanah
that is, Every *Jiva* or soul is an eternal part of myself²¹⁰. Therefore, every creature having consciousness of a Self is a spark of God and may therefore be treated either as God or as an *Avatar* of God. *Taittiriya Upanishad* commands or recommends the worship of God in the Parents, the Teacher *Acharya* or *Guru* and the Guests. Very often however term the *Avatar* is restricted only to *Vibhutis* that is, entities wherein there is a superabundance and exhibition of power, greatness and splendour as that term is used in the Bhagavad Gita²¹¹ Lord Krishna says:

Yadyad Vibhutimat Satvam
Srimad Urjitam Evava
Tat Tat Eva Avagachchatvam
Mama Tejo Amsa Sambhavam

that is, whatever is superb and excellent and powerful, know it to be a part of My splendour.

In practice, it is the latter usage that prevails. Referring to all creatures as God or *Avatar* causes only confusion, however useful it may be for the practice by serious *sadhakas* to see God in all creatures. Though it is good for children to worship parents and wives to worship husbands, the parents and the husbands are not God to the public. In this chapter, we shall use the term God to mean *Vibhuti* of God that is, one who can be worshipped with benefit by any one, unlike parents and husbands who are to be worshipped by their children or wives only. Using it in that sense, the question, Is Sai Baba of Shirdi God or not, can only have one answer, which is, that he is certainly God or a *Vibhuti*. Those who know enough facts about him find that he knows everything everywhere at any time, that he has power to do anything everywhere, that he has power to control the movements and the hearts of creatures, and even the elements of nature like rain and fire, that he had a mastery of the knowledge of the past, present, and future, even innumerable centuries away from the present, and that he had the highest moral principles of selflessness, service and love to all including the meanest beings. So they treat him as God, for our notion of God is one with vast unlimited power equally listening to the prayers of all and responding to all as a Universal Mother should do. God is the Universal Soul and the Universal Mother. Therefore, Sai Baba was and is rightly termed God and worshipped as God by those who noted his *Antaryamitwa* which means acting as the soul of various creatures. And he was not termed God by those who did not have such experience. So Baba was both God and not God, just as Tirupati Venkatesa is both God and not God. Venkatesa is God to the vast mass of Hindus but is nothing to an Australian or to a Chinese.

A biography of a saint like Baba must be highly illuminating, elevating, inspiring, and in every way practical. Taking the question of practicality, we note the fact that a very wonderful and unique personality like Sai Baba is yet unknown even to many parts of Maharashtra and Southern India, the two States where he is best known, while he is hardly sufficiently known to other States or Countries outside India. There is absolutely no reason why this state of affairs should continue. It is not the wish of Baba to hide his light under a bushel, but to

place it on a hill top so that everyone all around may share the benefits and have light, life and love. The natural course of things, the *Asuric bhava* of people prevent their understanding Sai Baba, has made the progress of knowledge of Baba very slow, but henceforth there can be no reason why those who have higher and refined natures in all parts of the country and elsewhere should not immediately be apprised of all the facts about Baba, atleast of the important fact throwing real light upon his *nature* and the benefits that it confers on those approaching him. Just as in the mango season, mangoes go around the whole country, similarly this is the Baba season and everyone can benefit by Baba. This season is provided by Providence for greater knowledge about Baba so that all people may approach him for benefit either individual, political, social, spiritual, or of other sorts. There is a very vast field for propaganda, though unfortunately that term has fallen into bad odour on account of the absolute lack of conscience in the manner in which diplomacy is carried on and propaganda is another name for deliberate, unjustifiable, and selfish lying of the worst sort in order to delude and ruin others. But the original sense of the word ought to be restored and everyone must feel that he has a duty to propagate and publish all useful and inspiring facts such as those that have been already set forth about Baba herein and may be set out in the latter portions of this book. A great soul like Baba appears in this world in order that his life, light and love, may be absorbed by all and not only by particular sections or classes or individuals. Hence the question we have set out to discuss in this chapter as to the nature of Baba may be easily dealt with for purposes of propaganda. Baba is undoubtedly a beneficent universal power responding to prayer, responding to appeals of every sort by those who are sincere, true, loyal and faithful. This is our conception of our God and Baba answers to that conception and stands the test at the hands of every sincere and honest soul. He will prove himself to be divine and the bestower of innumerable divine blessings to everyone that approaches him. Therefore without further discussion of the question as to whether Baba is God or is not God, we shall deal with it as Sri Krishna dealt with the question of his being viewed as God in the Bhagavad Gita²¹². Low natures deluded by *Maya* and driven by their own low

impulses to a life of sin and vice, can never see beneath the surface, and are content to know the outside or the external and treat Baba or Krishna as a mere human being. But persons who have a fraction at least of *Daivi Prakriti*, who can put down the impulses of their lower nature and yield more and more of power to their altruistic and other noble impulses, will get their natures more and more refined and will be able to perceive Krishna's and Baba's real nature. As stated in *Srimad Bhagavata* nothing more is needed as a *sadhana* to achieve this purpose than mere listening to accounts of Sri Krishna and Baba. Sri Krishna's in *Bhagavata* and Baba's in this biography and in the numerous books on Baba which can be got in any language²¹³.

For purposes of fuller treatment of this subject, let us take the alternative that any particular reader is not able to treat Baba as God. Still, is there any use he can make of the facts about Baba contained herein or in other books? The answer is undoubtedly in the affirmative. We are not interested in Theology or in development of religions as religions. We are concerned solely with souls as such and with benefits to humanity at large. That is a grand enough object for anyone to concentrate all his energies on. Baba's great purpose in life was to benefit humanity. Many a person who for some reason or other is unable to treat Baba as God is still able enough to perceive some of the highest elements in Baba such as his miraculous power and beneficence and approach him either for aid or for any other purpose, and will undoubtedly derive all round temporal and spiritual benefit. We should certainly not dissuade any person who thinks that Baba is a sort of powerful saint though not God from approaching him for obtaining various temporal benefits, for example urgent relief from various troubles that make life bitter. There are numerous persons of this sort who want very urgent relief and Baba is the person who will grant the relief to them. The method of obtaining such relief can be easily discovered by going through books on Baba. Generally by reading about Baba, more information is obtained, as also faith, but such faith need not be faith, in him as God, but faith in him as a *Sadguru* or as a *Satpurusha*, or simply as a *Mahatma*, will suffice. That will benefit the public. Such is Baba's nature.

From the above one can see that the nature and functions of Baba can be viewed in so many different ways. First, those who are able to view him as God have one set of ideas about his nature and functions. This set may be all embracing, as God's nature and God's functions are so vast and all embracing. If God is defined as *Brahman* in the *Upanishadic dictum*

Sarvam Kalvidam Brahma

that is, All this in the Universe is *Brahman* or God, then the functions of God are the functions of everything in the Universe and, therefore, infinite and undefinable. But many may object to such a wide definition of God, especially our Christian and *Madhva* brethren for example, who wish to contrast and restrict God, who would say that God should not be demeaned and identified with so many low, worthless, and meanest things in the world. God is excellence, purity, and all nobility, the height of *sattvic* quality, and should not be degraded to the level of highly *rajasic* and highly *tamasic* entities, such as the devil or *Satan* is in Christian conception. These friends of ours would say that God is inside or immanent in all such low creatures but is not identical with them. This may puzzle others. But whatever is the correct theological view which we need not discuss here, we can take even our Christian and Madhva conceptions of divinity and find an almost unlimited field for our sketching out the nature and functions of God or of a divine person like Sai Baba. In a treatise like this, it is impossible to attempt even a rough outline of all the excellences of divine personalities, and we must content ourselves with just sketching out a few prominent features, just as in the Bhagavad Gita²⁰⁹ where Arjuna asks Sri Krishna, 'What are the excellent manifestations of God', Sri Krishna gives two or three dozens of illustrations and then says that a complete list is impossible, and He winds up with the stanza

Yadyad Vibhutimat Satvam

that is, Wherever there is nobility, splendour, success, fortune on an unprecedented scale, feel God is there.

We appeal to persons with such qualities, for help in our difficulties. Sai, being clothed with such divine splendour, is appealed to for aid by persons in trouble and badly in need of help. We may, therefore, close this chapter about

nature and functions, with the remark that such nature and functions will be beaming out almost everywhere in this book, especially in later chapters, where we sketch Baba's dealings with a few prominent devotees and refer to his achievements in various fields including the occasion of death and provision of *Sadgati*.

Sadgati is deemed to be almost the highest help which any one can have. What is this life for? What are we to do with it before Death's icy fingers wipe out our life, and at the moment when the actual wiping is going on? This is a matter of supreme interest dealt with in a special chapter devoted to it, and the function of Baba in that matter would be regarded as his most important function by many. After all according to *Guru Gita*, that help is only one of the items of help which the *Samartha Sadguru* like Sai Baba confers upon his surrendered devotees. All persons do not think alike and persons especially with a phlegmatic or sanguine temperament steeped in the world's quest of joy and success may consider various other matters as of greater interest than *Sadgati*. Highly advanced souls, unruffled by loss and gain also may take the same view. To them also we may point out that other matters also are dealt with in this book, though not arranged in a strictly scientific fashion. We may wind up this chapter on nature and functions of Baba with one observation.

Ye yatha mam Prapadyante

Tam Stathaiva Bhajam Yaham^{2U}

This means, In whatever way people approach Me, in the same way I respond to their appeals, says Sri Krishna. Baba's many-sided nature enables him to deal suitably with an infinite variety of people of all castes, creeds, ages, and mentalities approaching him for their various purposes. This suiting to their needs and answering their needs, is by no means the least important function of Baba. Baba's infinite possibilities cannot be exhausted by human science and skill. Let us each bite off only what we can chew and digest.