

Twenty-one

Baba and Maya Theory

Sai Baba of Shirdi has, if we may rely upon Das Ganu's earliest chapters about him, referred to *Maya* expressly and taught his devotee Nana Chandorkar and others important truths about the place of *Maya* in God's work. Nana Chandorkar finding it difficult to understand the place of *Maya* in a universe

created by god or *Suddha Chaitanya* questioned Baba, Who is the *Maya*! and elicited interesting answers. Baba had first talked about *Suddha Chaitanya* referring to *Poorna Parabrahman* by that phrase, and incidentally referred to *Maya*. Baba said, Just as there are degrees in regality when we consider the extent of respect or reverence paid to the king, his deputy, and his peon, we find similarly that there are degrees of *Chaitanya* in the world. There are three grades of persons, the *Paramartika* stage person sees truth as truth and acts according to sastras that is without observing differentiation. The next is the person in the *Vyavaharika* stage, called the good who follows the *Sastras* but goes on differentiating between good and evil, rejecting the latter and preferring the former. Thirdly, there is the person in the *Pratibhasica* stage, called the ignorant who does not see the truth either entirely as it is or with the addition of differentiation merely, but sees it quite inverted that is seeing the good as evil and evil as good. *Atman* or *Brahman* is common to all the three. It is to illustrate this position that Baba referred to the king, his deputy, and his messenger. He gave another illustration also, namely, the infinite *Akasa* or Space, then the *akasa* which is in a big pot, called *Kumbhakasa*, and thirdly, in a small pot, called *Ghatakasa*. In all the three *Akasa* is common but it is in different degrees. Baba therefore said, Just like that, *Brahman* appears in different forms in this world which is the play of *Maya*. It is the union of *Brahman* with *Maya* that causes *Brahmanda* the universe. Then Chandorkar put the question, 'who is this *Maya*! Who created her, and what is she like?' You just now said that the root of the whole world is *Chaitanya*. Then where does *Maya* come in?' Baba's answer was, 'I will describe to you where and how she comes. *Maya* is the name given to the *Shakti* or Power of *Chaitanya*, which makes *Chaitanya* appear in the different forms. Can you separate *Chaitanya* from its *Shakti*! You cannot, just as you cannot separate jaggery from its sweetness and the Sun from its brilliance. The separation from *Chaitanya* comes only at the end of all existence, that is, when there is a final merger of the Universe in *Brahman*. *Maya* ends when *Chaitanya* is realised. *Chaitanya* is endless. Both *Chaitanya* and *Maya* are beginningless. Then Baba added, *Maya* and *Chaitanya* are also named *Prakriti* and *Purusha*.

And these are fully described in *Jnaneswari*. He referred Chandorkar to *Jnaneswari* to get full *Atma Jnana* that is, knowledge about this *Maya* theory. He added *Maya* is *Karya* and has wonderful qualities. I am such and such a person. You are such and such are all the result of *Maya*. All these are unreal differences. You see if you are under *Maya*, undifferentenced Reality does not appear. *Maya* has two aspects, namely, the *Avarana* covering up the consciousness of the soul I or *atman* and *Vikshepa* producing illusory appearances over the covering. A cooly dreamt that he became a king. Thereby he forgot his coolyship. That coolyship was covered up, that is, by *Avarana* and kingship was produced by *Maya* over that cover, that is *Vikshepa*. *Maya* covers up *Brahman* and produces all worldly appearances! Baba then added the words, In reality, the world does not exist. Only one Real *Sat* exists, but these appearances are taken to be real. That causes the mischief *akalyan*. So kick out *Maya* and regain *Brahman*. How is it to be done? Regard yourself as Pure *Chaitanya*. Water when relieved of impurity is pure water. Similarly remove impurity of *Maya* from this world of appearances. Then that appearance becomes reality. This is the *upasana* of the Real *Sadvastu*. Think of this always. This is my advice to all. This constant thought of the *Sadvastu* or *Atman* is the *Adhyatma*. You should realise this *Atman* as yourself and become *Mukta* in this life. This is the summing up given by Das Ganu on this very important matter of what Baba said about *Maya*. We may very well sum it up by saying that Baba referred to all manifestations through the power of God or *Brahman* as the work of *Maya*, and the highest goal of spiritual endeavour is to go back to God crossing this world of appearances which keeps us away from God. This is another way of putting the grand verse in Bhagavad Gita²⁶¹,

Daivihyesha Gunamay
Mama maya Duratyaya
Mameva yee prapadyaru
May am Etam taranti te,

this means, This *Devi* who is composed of the three *gunas* is my *Maya* and impossible to get over. Those get over it who surrender themselves completely to

me, they can cross *Maya*. is the effect of this stanza and Baba's sayings? One thing is patent. If a person wishes to be completely identified with *Parabrahman* and lose his personality or individuality in the Universal Self then the course for him is to think of *Poorna Parabrahman* only. That is to think of nothing else, not even to think to himself as an ego, or if the thought of ego comes, he must at once crush it by regarding it as only one of the appearances of the same Supreme *Brahman* and therefore, in no way different from the Supreme *Brahman*. Now, the thought of one's own personality is accompanied by a sense of difference between the self and the nonself; I am here, you are there and these things are elsewhere. In that way there is the idea of a self or personality distinguished from the surroundings. There is no personality without contrast to the surroundings. By reason of this differentiation, the world of manifestation gets on. Various individuals strive for their individual benefits. Hence comes mutual conflict between individuals and groups and nations. Therefore, if one wishes that there should be no conflict at all, the basis of all difference must be removed, and that basis is 'You are in that body; I am here in this body; The two bodies are different bodies by difference in space, time and characteristics. As long as we regard these differences of time, space and causation as real and essential, we think of ourselves and proceed to work out what we think is for our benefit and happiness. But if our work turns useless, and instead of happiness, unhappiness is derived, we have to reverse the process. Reversing the process is done by removal of the distinctions in our minds that we are different from each other and from our surroundings.

The difference between persons is based upon the identification by each individual or himself with the body. If that identification goes, it will be easy for each to regard himself as the *Paramatma*. All differences will then perish, because all parts of *Paramatma* are equally *Paramatma*. In that case, there is no one troubling the other and no cause of unhappiness. The state of the *Paramatma* is *Satchitananda*, that is, Supreme Bliss, not positive joy like the tasting of sugar as contrasted with the tasting of chillies, but an ineffable state of peace, which is said to be the very nature of *Paramatma*. Therefore Baba's

advice and the advice of Sri Krishna may be taken to be a practical prescription. Regard everything in the world as part and parcel of or as really *Paramatma*, including yourself, and thus achieve your supreme goal or supreme peace and bliss. About this conclusion, it is not likely to be a serious dispute or discussion, at least by those who believe in monism. Even those who believe in Dualism or pluralism may agree in treating all egos as part of God at the final stage, and thus practically agree with the above conclusion.

So far there is little reason for quarrel or dispute, but the serious difficulty in this matter arises when persons try to put forward the theory of *Maya* as a proposition for intellectuals to agree to as the result of enquiry and reasoning. Persons are asked to regard everything about them as mere unreality and proceed to deal with the world's affairs on that footing. Now here comes the difficulty. It is patent that if I really regard others and the difference between myself and others as fiction of *Maya*, I cannot be talking with another about this fiction. The very contact itself is fiction and the talk is fiction and the person addressed in order to be convinced is also fictitious. So, there appears to be an apparent absurdity in that position. This is the frequent subject matter of attacks against *Advaitism* and the question is whether Baba ever intended to convey the idea that for purposes of philosophy or for wordly conduct, one can proceed to deal with others in actual life on the footing of the *Maya* theory? Baba was never concerned with maintaining philosophical conclusions never debating various conflicting philosophical theories. He was a *Guru* intent on practical guidance of those who sought him for guidance. So, when he talked about *Maya* to Chandorkar, he made it clear that what he said related to the *sadhana* to be adopted by Chandorkar for purposes of God realisation and self realisation. It was not an attempt to make Chandorkar accept one intellectual conclusion about the *Maya* theory to be kept along with a number of theories and hypotheses and rules for guidance in worldly affairs. The whole mischief arises only if the latter course is adopted. Baba can never be considered to have given any decision of his regarding the correctness or incorrectness of *Monism* and *Dualism*. *Maya* has thus been referred to as the power of God to manifest himself, and when so

viewed, no serious objection can be raised to references to *Maya* for the limited purpose of undertaking God's work and manifestation, the way in which the *sadhakas* should work in order to get *moksha* or liberation, that is, God realisation. To this extent, we may say that Baba's positions stated in the beginning of this chapter as to *Maya* are fairly good and clear, and most readers can accept it and proceed upon it. With Baba's view of *Karma* we shall next proceed to deal, and see what position was put forward by Baba. Baba was explaining Hinduism to Hindus and *Dvaitism* to the *Dvaitins*. So, Baba had no separate position of his own. In the matter of *Karma*, almost all Hindus are agreed that the doctrine of *Karma* does apply to human dealings and even dealings amongst creatures. Baba has applied the law of *Karma* even to dogs and other creatures and which may be said to be nothing but this, namely, a cause produces an effect. Every action done with a certain mentality tends to strengthen that mentality and produce not merely the results worked for but also a tendency to continue that mentality further and further with greater and greater strength. If a man begins with grabbing, against all scriptural injunctions that we should not have greed, the result is greed grows upon one. The more we think of the objects coveted, the stronger is our affection for the objects, and if there are other persons who obstruct or stand in the way, greed turns into anger.

Says the Gita²⁶²

Sangath sanjayate Kamah

Kamath Krodhobijayate

that is, From attachment to objects anger springs up.

Krodhat Bhavati Sammohah.

that is, From anger arises confusion or delusion. A person in a state of anger fancies all sorts of things as being true or essential to his happiness and acts under those delusions.

Sammohat Smritivibhramah.

that is, The power to perceive moral truths and the way in which events progress and affect one's own welfare and that of others, is lost. No clear perception remains.

Smriti Bhramsat Buddhi Nascāh

Buddhi Nascat Pranasyati

That is, By reason of losing one's memory, stored wisdom is lost, with the loss of wisdom, the soul is lost. Thus, the Gita describes the chain of consequences resulting from attachment or desire. The law of *karma* points out how causes and effects follow each other and affect the future of every *Jiva* that is conscious of its separate individuality. Therefore, the law of *karma* is a mere statement of moral law and no person can seriously complain of the operation of the law. But often we find an expression of confused opinions about *karma* by persons who misunderstand the law of *karma*. None should complain that causes produce effects. But the complaint is often heard, that by *karma* a person is greatly hampered, and the tendency of everything to aggravate itself and carry one on to a bitter end cannot be a good law. This, however, is to confuse tendencies with actual facts. In actual life persons have various tendencies and have also the principle of variation. When a person goes on in a downward current from sin to worse sin, from crime to worse crime, some former touch with holy persons or places comes suddenly as an element of variation to interrupt the chain of worsening consequences - the chain of evil to greater evil and thus stops him. Ajamila is one instance. For another instance, the Veerabhadrappa and Basappa case may be cited. They were two persons who bowed to Baba in one *janma* and had bitter differences. Veerabhadrappa by reason of his greed for money with considerable power and personality was wrath with Basappa for claiming the property which came to Gowri, the wife of Veerabhadrappa. Basappa, greedy enough to get at that property, had that loathsome quality called cowardice, and lack of strength, and Veerabhadrappa vowed to drink the blood of Basappa. Basappa sought refuge with Baba, and Baba agreed to protect him. Before the revenge was carried out both died, and Veerabhadrappa to carry out his hatred and to kill his opponent was born as a cobra and Basappa was born as a frog. The cobra was in the next *janma* proceeding to catch that frog, when Baba in that *janma* intervened and told Veerabhadrappa, 'Cease from your hatred. Give up your attempt to harass your enemy Basappa. Then Veerabhadrappa the

snake gave up the frog. Baba said, 'One's evil *karma* will continue till one's contact with *Satpurushas* saves one from further consequences'. From hatred to murder was Veerabhadrappe's natural downfall. But Baba came in and gave him a warning. So, the working of the previous evil *vasanas* was suddenly stopped and a new element got into Veerabhadrappe's life, namely, self-control, giving up of hatred and these would lead to good results. So, the law of *karma* for good persons promotes good, and for evil persons promotes evil. So, in itself the law of *karma* is not a matter for regret. One must always remember that there are laws of one's own being and God's plan for all creatures. Any one who wishes sincerely to achieve his own soul's welfare would pause to study what his duties are and seek the help of great ones and *Gurus* to guide him in his path, then by surrendering himself to great ones, allow his evil *vasanas* to be crushed out and good *vasanas* to be developed, and ultimately to get both sets of *vasanas* which are part of one's personality to be drowned in the contemplation of the Guru-God. This is the teaching about *Karma* by *Sadhakas* to Baba. The law of *Karma* is decried by people who do not understand it. Some say that *Karma* can never be got rid off. There is an element of truth in that statement. But the way in which it is put as above is misleading and wrong. The law of *Karma* is merely the law of cause and effect. To say that an effect cannot be rectified or modified is absurd. If cause A produces the effect B, it is absurd to say that B must always continue to be B and nothing can change it. Just as cause A produces effect B, cause C impinging upon B may make changes in the effect. The fact is that most acts done with a purpose are producing certain tendencies and certain other results. One should not confuse the actual result or reward earned by an act with the tendency. The tendency can and should always be met if it is an evil tendency. To say that *karma* is inexorable, and nothing can change it, is positively absurd. Generally people think of tendencies when putting forward that proposition, and one can be positive that all tendencies may change by stimuli producing opposite tendencies. Sinfulness is a tendency and it can always and should always be met by virtuous actions, virtuous contacts, holy readings and *Satsang*. As for the rewards, it is often said,

Avascyam Anubhoktavyam

Kritam karma scubha Ascubham.

that is, What one has earned as a reward or punishment for one's act, good or evil must of necessity be endured. This is generally speaking true. But it is not true in the way in which it is baldly put. A person who commits murder is liable to be hanged. But he may also have other forms of punishment either immediately or later on. The sentences may be altered, reduced, and even completely condoned on such occasions as the King's Birthday pardons. Therefore, it is not correct to say that the reward or punishment earned by conduct is unalterable. Everything on earth is liable to change or mitigate and if we remember this, we shall be able to meet the objections sometimes raised to Sai Baba's statement about *karma*. In the very opening Charters of Baba's Charters and Sayings, we find Baba's statement. 'If one puts his foot on Shirdi soil his *karma* is abolished'. Many a man wonders whether that is possible especially in view of the dictum quoted above, *Avascyam Anubhoktavyam*. Baba also told Chandorkar that certain broad decisions arrived at as to the birth and death of people are treated as facts resulting from previous acts of individuals. Regarding birth of a child, death of a son-in-law, about which Chandorkar was anxious to make Baba work on his behalf, Baba declared that they were the result of previous *karma* and could not be altered. In a sense that is true. Certain births and certain deaths are all fixed by series of antecedent events, but yet Baba is able to mould these and shape these, at certain stages and modify these for the benefit of the concerned devotees. When talking to Dr. Chidambaram Pillai, Baba explained the correct doctrine. Dr. Pillai had been suffering intensely from guinea worm. He told a friend to go and report to Baba that his sufferings were intolerable and to request Baba to transfer these sufferings to some ten later births of his and leave him free from the sufferings in this *janma*. When this was reported to Baba, the latter sent for Pillai and told him, 'What, you want ten *janmas*? What has to be endured in ten *janmas* can be crushed into ten days by the power of *Satpurushas*'. So, Baba ordered him to remain with his legs outstretched at *Dwarakamayee* and he told him that a crow would come and peck at his wound

and cure him. In a few days, Abdul, Baba's permanent attendant, carelessly put his foot down upon Pillai's wound and crushed all the guinea worms out of it, merely by accident as, he Pillai, would have thought. But nothing done at the Mosque to Pillai could be considered as an accident, and Baba said that Abdul was the crow, and that no further crow was wanted to peck at Pillai's wound. Pillai was then asked to go home, and in ten days, the entire suffering from guinea worm was cured.

In another case, that of Bhimaji, who had serious chest diseases such as asthma and tuberculosis, Baba first told Shama, 'In bringing this thief to me what a load of responsibility you are placing on me. Baba meant that the tuberculosis and asthma from which Bhimaji suffered were the result of Bhimaji's *karma* in a previous *janma* consisting of theft. Bhimaji felt Baba's declaration a blow. At once he surrendered himself to Baba and said, Helper of the helpless! I am helpless. Pray show pity and grace to me. Then Baba's tone changed, Baba told him, The *Fakir* is merciful, and your disease will be cured. He was suffering from the results of a *karma*, but that could be mitigated, and so the man was sent to live and sleep in a wet verandah. Bhimaji did so. There, he had two very dreadful dreams: In one dream, he was mercilessly birched by a school master. For, in the dream he fancied he was a boy and the master was birching him. So, he felt the pain in the dream and roared out. In the second dream, it was even worse. He felt that some one was placing a stone roller and rolling it over his breast. He suffered all the horror of instant death approaching him. All the pain of a hanging sentence and whipping sentence were endured by this man in the course of one night. Baba thus changed the punishment which he had earned by his previous *karma*, and told him that he was thus free from *karmic* effects. He then recovered his health. The above instances go to show that most of our conceptions about *karma* are nebulous and ungrounded, and that the safest course for us to follow would be to be guided by the dicta of *Satpurushas* like Sai Baba.