

CHAPTER I

MAHLSAPATHY

To some it may be surprising that an account of the universalistic Sai movement and its leaders should begin with Mahlsapathy, an uncultured poor village goldsmith. But that fits in with the movement starting from the obscure wretchedly poor hamlet of Shirdi in a nook of a nookshotten Kopergaon taluk (Kopergaon means corner village) and also with the lodestar or dynamo of the movement being Sri Sai, an unknown" and supposedly crazy fakir as he was taken to be at first. If absence of literary culture were an objection to Mahlsapathy being the leader of the army of Sai bhaktas, it must be applicable equally to Sai himself, the centre or pole star of the Sai movement. Sai who knew everything had no school or book education; no University conferred its diplomas on him. The man who began his worship (M) had only the elementary education which the village veranda schools impart. He would however read his castemen's Bible, namely, Mahlsapathy Purana, and would carry on the traditional worship of Mahlsapathy at home and abroad. In one respect, it is a fact of happy augury that the person who started Sai worship was a pious and orthodox Hindu, who first raised the orthodox objection to Baba's stepping into and residing at the Khandoba temple in his charge, but soon developed into the most zealous admirer and ardent worshipper of Baba. It is this zealous admiration and ardour of the highly virtuous goldsmith that forced Baba to reverence him in turn and to accept the flowers, sandal, and other things placed on his feet by way of homage. His self dedication and great attachment to Sai Baba were irresistible for a large-hearted soul like Sai, and so he (Mahlsapathy) was the first and only person allowed for a long time to worship Sai. The worship no doubt was hardly worship at the beginning. It is difficult to distinguish worship from regard, reverence, and honour evidenced by offer of flowers, sandal, and eatables. Worship has grown throughout the world out of regard, reverence, and a desire to placate. All these were in Mahlsapathy, and his placing flowers and sandal at the feet of Baba and offering him milk were obviously marks of respect. Sai Baba the fakir could not object to them even though these were offered in the Mosque.

When these grew definitely more and more like worship, then Baba himself felt how incongruous Hindu worship of himself was in the Mosque, though it had to grow and develop from there. Its growth in the Mosque turning it finally into a "*Dwarka-mayee*" controlled entirely by a Hindu Board reminds us of a small shoot of a banyan creeping through the cleft of a rock, which a plant cannot easily go through; but yet the banyan grows through it and pushes the pieces of rock aside and grows into huge dimensions. Such was the growth and development of the Hindu puja of Baba. Mahlsapathy the weak Bhikshuk was pre-eminently fitted to be the person who should play the part of the banyan seed. Hence it is not inappropriate to begin the account of Sai history and Sai movement and its leaders with an account of Mahlsapathy.

Mahlsapathy was, as already stated, a hereditary goldsmith (sonar) of the village of Shirdi- The sonars vie with Brahmins and others in their social and religious observances and sometimes style themselves Brahmins and wear the sacred thread. Even in that community, he was noted for his fervent devotion to his tutelary deity Khandoba (known also as Mahlsapathy). Mahlsapathy Purana was his Bible or Ramayana for daily study and for sacred reading at the periodical gatherings of sonars and at the temple (family temple). Every year he went on a pilgrimage of 150 miles to distant Jejoori carrying a Kavadi or palki along with a band to worship at the great temple of that deity. Full fruition of Mahlsa bhakti resulted in his getting that god's obsession in trance (Avesa); and oracular utterances came from that god through his lips. He was Khandoba. He was perfectly pure, straightforward, righteous, and truthful, for only such a guileless person can be favoured by the god coming on his body (Avesa). He was fairly free from worldly desires. The family had a scanty income from the voluntary offerings at their temple which went to the temple maintenance; and all that he owned was a mud house in the village for residence, yielding no income, and $7\frac{1}{2}$ acres of land evidently barren land without water supply, which also yielded practically nothing. The very old building outside the village, the Mahlsapathy temple, a poor mud structure, was dedicated to the public or to God. To eke out his living therefore he had the hereditary profession of a

goldsmith. But in a poor village with very few houses and very few visitors, even this brought very little income. Mahlsapathy was not much perturbed about it, being absorbed in his religious ideas and practices. He had frequent Avesa, i. e., visions and trances with obsession; and his goal in life like that of most pious Hindus, was to get free from the cycle of rebirths (Samsara) and attain Liberation (Moksha) through the grace of Khandoba. Khandoba is an Avatar of Siva and thus the Grantor of liberation. 'Moksham Ichchet Maheswarat' {which means, 'If you want liberation, go to Maheswara—Rudra or Siva), is the popular Neeti sloka. To achieve this goal, Mahlsapathy, besides having a satvic temperament, had the great help of Sat Sangha, i.e., contact with holy men (Sadhus, Saints, etc.) (Cf.B.S-XI (II) 25). Though conservative he was not fanatical; he had no hatred of Moslems or men of other faiths. On the other hand, he and other friends of his own temperament, viz., Kasiram Simpi and Appa Bhil, used to receive and help not only Hindu saints such as Devidas, Janakidas, etc., but also fakirs when these visited the village or stayed there. Kasiram and Appa had some means, but poor Mahlsapathy offered his services and zeal, and these three worked together. It was Mahlsapathy's good fortune, due perhaps to Rinanubandha, that he had very close contact with Sri Sai Baba for a very long period-over 40 (nearly 50) years. It was about 1872 perhaps that Sai Baba entered the village along with a "Barat", i.e. a bridegroom's party of Moslems headed by Chand Bhai, Patel of Dhupkeda (in the "Nizam's State"). Then Sai Baba separated from the marriage group very near Khandoba temple at the outskirts of Shirdi and sauntered along almost till the threshold of Khandoba temple. Mahlsapathy, who was inside worshipping Khandoba, noticed Baba's presence and, with usual civility and regard, invited him to sit. After a few minutes, the fakir Baba remarked- "How secluded and quiet a place is the Khandoba temple, best fitted for a Fakir to be in". Then it was that Mahlsapathy put his conservative back up and protested against the proposal that a Moslem should reside in Khandoba temple which in his opinion was unthinkable. Most Moslems are iconoclasts, (i.e. breakers of images) and,

therefore, Mahlsapathy prevented Baba from entering the temple which contained the images of Khandoba etc. Finding Mahlsapathy's objection to be natural, Baba said, 'God is one for Hindus, Moslems, and all, but, as you object to my entry, I shall go'. So saying Baba went away.

Baba in his earliest days was acting in ways wholly unintelligible to the villagers, and even Mahlsapathy considered that he behaved at times like a mad man (See M's reminiscences). But while others lost their respect for Baba on that account, Mahlsapathy always had great regard for Baba, perhaps remembering, as many Hindus do, that there is always a class of saints known as the Unmattha siddhas, crazy saints. Anyhow, the occasional crazy conduct of Baba at least in the view of Mahlsapathy and some others did not bulk large enough to prevent the great esteem which the general conduct of Baba evoked in serious and thoughtful minds, Baba was an absolute "Vairagya Purusha" and never cared for wealth or women. Mahlsapathy, being himself highly detached i.e. of a vairagya temperament and not being overruled by lust or other low urges, could easily appreciate Baba who had the same virtues of purity and non-attachment in a higher degree and therefore, from the very beginning was drawn to Baba. Other people began to worship Baba only when they saw Baba's psychic powers e. g. when he turned water into oil to feed his lamps, and then they regarded him as God. But Mahlsapathy esteemed Baba for his good qualities of purna satva and vairagya, that is, purity and non-attachment; and he found that compared even with Devidas, Janakidas, and other saints with whom Baba was often keeping company; Baba shone brilliantly, and that even those saints, highly regarded Baba. So, Mahlsapathy and his friends considered Baba as well fitted to be a Guru for themselves. Mahlsapathy in that group was the first to honour and then to worship Baba. He went to Baba's Mosque and placed flowers and sandal on Baba's feet or neck and offered him milk. Baba would not allow others to do even this; only Mahlsapathy was allowed to do it. This developed later into regular puja by the use of sandal paste and flowers on Baba's feet, neck, and finally on his forehead also. Even after that, local magnates like Nana Saheb

Dengle, who wanted to do Baba's puja, were not allowed to do it. Baba would tell them: 'There is the pillar in this Dwarakamayi (Mosque). Do puja to the pillar'. That of course, they did not care to do. Nana Saheb Dengle later requested the intercession of Dagdubhai, a constant companion of Baba and, encouraged by his words, did puja and became Baba's second worshipper, Baba gradually allowed others to do his puja, and then Baba's puja became general. Few realised the part played by Mahlsapathy as the pioneer of Sai puja and the Sai movement.

Mahlsapathy's contact with Baba was on very close terms. By reason of the death of his only son (in the eighties of the last century perhaps) and his having only three daughters, he was disgusted with life. His land yielded nothing, and the goldsmith's profession yielded also practically nothing. So, he was ready for the orders of his own Ishta Devata, Khandoba. Khandoba came upon him, that is, possessed his body, and gave him Drishtanta, that is, visions. In the first vision, he was told that he was to take Khandoba (i.e. movable images) from the Khandoba temple to his own house, and worship him there with concentration. In another vision, Khandoba appeared as an old Brahmin and said to him, "What? Can you not get your bread without your profession of goldsmith?"¹ Then Mahlsa-

¹ *Though sonars follow Brahminical rules or Achara-yet a goldsmith's work is worldly. Further, as a rule, goldsmiths filch part of the gold or silver given to them for making ornaments. This filching is done very cleverly with a sense of duty i.e. the feeling that filshing is the goldsmith's duty or dharma, the violation of which entails punishment. Here is an of quoted instance. A young goldsmith suffered from intense stomach trouble and informed his mother that it was due to his failure to filch part of the gold when she had given him her gold "Tali" or mai.galya bhushana to melt and remake. A story illustrative of the great cunning with which the gold (or silver) is filched is as follows. ^uuuuir ^liirtiir/r.

pathy answered the vision. 'Yes. I shall give up'. Then the vision said, 'Touch my feet, and hold to my feet This meant evidently, 'Hereafter, regard your subsistence as being dependent purely upon your holding to my feet and not upon your doing goldsmith's work*. From that time forwards, he gave up goldsmith's work in perfect trust (NISHTA AND SRADDHA) and lived by begging, that is, he became really a Sanyasi "Monk" or Bhikshaikari, though living with a family of a wife and three daughters. Being disgusted with life, he did not care to sleep at home for that would develop his family cares and burdens, i.e. Samsara, still further. He enjoyed Baba's Company day and night and was

A military officer wanted to have a gold plate or strip put on his cane. He came to a goldsmith, gave him a sovereign and sat in front of his anvil with a bare sword. He said that if the goldsmith filched any of the gold, he would be stabbed with that sword immediately. The goldsmith had his fire ready and made the sovereign into three plates and began applying one strip of gold to the cane. Meanwhile some boys were playing marbles in front of the smithy. To divert the officer's attention, the goldsmith pointed to the boys and told the officer "See, Sir, these boys are ruined by their marble play". The officer diverted his gaze to the boys just for a few seconds and within that time, the goldsmith picked up one of the gold strips from the ground and hid it in his palm in which he was holding his pincers. But as he would have to stretch his palm, holding it up to receive his wages, he hit on another device. He asked the officer what for he held his bare sword in his hand. The reply was "To stab you if you steal any of the gold". At once the goldsmith, as though horrified, put his hand to his mouth saying "Appa Appa Amma Amma". It is usual for horrified persons to beat their mouth with their palm. While doing so, his palm slipped the gold strip into his mouth where it was safe from discovery. The work was then completed and the poor officer paid the wages into his palm, fancying that nothing had been stolen. Such is the proverbial cleverness and pertinacity of goldsmiths in 'stealing precious metals, etc.

greatly benefitted thereby. At the Mosque and at the chavadi, Baba slept on alternate nights and to both places Mahlsapathy went and had his bed along with Baba.² Mahlsapathy's main work was to be with Baba. and he never failed to be with and sleep with Baba. But on one occasion, early in life, about 1896, Baba himself said, "Arre Baagat, listen to my fakiri words, which are always true. You are coming and sleeping here and not with your wife. But you have got only daughter (the only son *he* had must have died before 1896.) Daughters are like tamarind fruit but a son is like a mango fruit. You go and take bed in your house, and you will then get a son," In spite of Baba's pressure, he declined to go home as he did not want his family (samsara) to increase. But his friend Kasiram Simpi compelled him and took him home and left him there. Thereafter he took his bed in his house. He started it on the Janmashtami of 1896, and on the next Janmash-tami (1897) a son was born to him. Baba's words are ever true and never false. But, having got a son, he resumed his old vow of not developing Samsara and ever afterwards slept only with Baba, in the Mosque, and at the chavadi. Mahlsapathy would spread his own cloth and on that Baba (when not lying on the plank) would lie on one half, and he would lie on the other. Baba also gave him very hard duties which others could not possibly undertake. Baba would tell Mahlsapathy, "You had better sit up. Do not go to sleep. Place your hand on my heart. I will be going on with remembrance of Allah, Nama Smaran, that is, a half conscious trance, and during that Nama Smaran, the heart beat would clearly show you that I am still having Nama Smaran. If that suddenly goes away and natural sleep supervenes, wake me up." The heart beat during natural sleep would be evidently different from the heart beat of the contemplative trance. Thus neither Baba nor Mahlsapathy would sleep at night. Both would keep awake, Baba for

² *To both places, only after Baba broke the small plank on which he kept lying wide awake at the Mosque. Before that, evidently, it was only at the chavadi that Mahlsapathy slept with Baba. Baba's breaking the plank may have been about 1898.

directly communing with God, and by that means doing service to numerous devotees in various places, and Mahlsapathy for sharing the merit (*punya*) by keeping the vigil with Baba and benefiting himself morally and spiritually by his pious service. His *tapas* was the same practically as the tapas of Baba, that is, vigil for holy purposes. He also had great control over all his senses (Indriyas), not merely over the sex urge but also over hunger and other urges and cravings, though he was not able to overcome sleep always. At times for a fortnight he would go without food, purely by the power of his will, and sometimes his family also would suffer as shortage of food was the consequent of Mahlsapathy's having no profession and no earning and his rejection of offers of money and goods. This is a very important point to note about Mahlsapathy. His attitude towards acceptance of alms is one which very orthodox Hindus would understand. He regarded all acceptance of alms from others as a direct interference with his own perfection of power. (See SB XI (17) 41). Pratigraham manyamanah Tapas tejo Yesconudam i. e. "accepting gifts as destructive of austerities, power, and fame". His "*Apoorva*" i. e. stored up merit was heightened by lasting, vigils, and other "punya karma," such as reading of sacred literature, etc., and if he accepted gifts (dana) from others, he believed (as many other orthodox Hindus believe) that his merit or *Apoorva* would be lost, "diminished, or transferred at least to some extent to the donor whose gift he accepted. Therefore he was strongly opposed to accepting any gifts (except Biksha food) even though he and his family might be starving. His family also completely accepted that axiom and they also would generally reject offers of help in money, materials, etc.³ Baba himself several times tried to press him to accept money.

³ *Chintaraan Rao's offer of Rs. 1000. M. A. Sait's offer of Rs. 100. Some one's offer of Rs. 10 was rejected. Baba asked what it was M- refused. 'Rs. 10,' he was told. Then Baba himself received the Rs. 10 and immediately gave it away to some one present. M was a sadhaka still and feared contact of wealth. But Baba, realising himself as the Atman had no fear of being tainted or tempted by touching money, etc. See S. B. (Bhikshu Gita) Ch XXIII 57, Ch. IV (17) which

When Baba was getting large incomes, (1880-1918) he was daily showering Rs. 30 on one, Rs. 15 on another, Rs. 10 on a third, and so on. Baba told Mahlsapathy several times;-'Take this Rs. 3. Go on taking it'. Mahlsapathy invariably refused. Baba even added. 'Go on receiving Rs. 3. I will make you well-to-do, and other people will come to you and depend on you and look to your favour; make your life comfortable." Mahlsapathy invariably replied: 'I do not want all that. I want only to worship your feet.' He counted his avoidance of gifts and contentment with his lot as far above his attaining or retaining material wealth. He (M) would not sleep on cots. He would not care to have comforts of any other sort, even though these were available or offered to him. He strongly reminds us of the holy poverty of St. Francis of Assissi, the Akinchanya, which is so highly praised in scripture (see especially M. B. Moksha Dharma Scanti P. ch. 165 Samyaka upadesa. 5-11, 16 & 22). Baba had to offer inducements of "*Abhaya*" and support, etc. to various people to raise them to high spiritual effort. But in the case of Mahlsapathy, no inducements and assurances were required, as Mahlsapathy had already achieved the high, water mark of purity, virtue, austerity (tapas), and wisdom (Jnana), so far as that was possible in his circumstances.

An important event in Mahlsapathy's life that he was connected with was Baba's trying to leave his body about 1886 and returning to it three days later. Baba had made him the guardian of his body and told him, '*Arre Bhagat, look after this body for three days. I am going to Allah. If I do not return, then get it buried in due course at that place, (that is, near the sacred gode neem tree).'

Mahlsapathy supported Baba's body on his own knee, and when officers, including the village headman karnam, etc., held an inquest over the body, declared it dead, and wanted it to be buried he with the help of others stoutly opposed their proposal and saved Baba from losing his body, as

runs thus " Arthanjnshan api hrishikapate na liptah, ye anye svatah parihritadapi bibhyati sma" (i e. O! Lord of your senses, you are unaffected by objects you enjoy, while others are afraid of them even in the absence of those objects.)

Sankaracharya's is said to have been lost (See Sankara Vjaya) when he tried a similar attempt to leave and re-enter his body in order to enter a grihasta royal body by *parakaya pravesa*. Thus, he rendered a valuable service in 1886, after which Baba lived for 32 years to create this huge Sai movement that has covered this land. If Mahlsapathy had failed in his duty, and Baba had been buried perhaps the course of history might have been different.

One incident we may mention as to how he (M) served Baba and carried out his pious efforts. As usual, he had spread his cloth and Baba was lying on one half of that cloth, and he was lying on the other. Then Baba told him. 'I say, come on. To-day we shall be on the watch. The rude Rohilla (death from plague) is wanting to take away the wife of the Nigoj Patil. I am praying to Allah to prevent that by Nama Smaran. You had better see that no one comes and disturbs me in my Nama Smaran.'

Accordingly Mahlsapathy kept awake to try and see that no disturbance took place. But, unfortunately, in the middle of the night the Nivas Mamlatdar had come. He and his peons took a fancy to take Baba's darsan, which could be had for nothing, so, at midnight, the peon of the Mamlatdar came and stating that Darsan was wanted and udhi was wanted, made a noise. Mahlsapathy tried to prevent it but who could prevent official *hauteur* or *jabardas* ? Mahlsapathy was trying to oblige the poen by getting down the steps to give him some udhi, but the noise made disturbed Baba's trance (contemplation), and Baba sat up, and hurled foul curses and told Mahlsapathy. 'Arre Bhagat, you are a man with family! And don't you know what is taking place at Nigoj? This disturbance has caused a failure in my efforts. *That Patil's wife is dead*. Let that go. What has happened is for the best'. In his anger, Baba threw away Mahlsa-pathy's cloth on him, telling him that he should not allow disturbance like that to Baba's holy work of contemplation and prayer.

Baba, for about 40 years must have benefited Mahlsapathy in innumerable ways the details of which are not available, and above all kept him to the high water mark of devotion, surrender and self abnegation. As usual, Baba used his wonderful Supranormal powers and knowledge e.g. His

knowledge of the present in all distant places, which is called "clairvoyance" and knowledge of the future, immediate or remote, to benefit Mahlsapathy. He used also his control over minds and matter (including human bodies) for his devotee's benefit and kept watching him to secure his welfare whether he was near or far, even 150 miles off and gave him warning and afforded relief where necessary.

Baba's "eye of vigilant supervision is ever on those who love him". Baba's watch over Mahlsa saved him from shipwreck in his food problems. At times, for long periods the starvation of the devotee and his family came perilously-near the danger point. Then Baba suddenly made the devotee relax his vow. On one such occasion, H. S. Dixit was somehow made aware of the danger. He wished to send up a ten rupee note to Mahlsapathy- To make sure that it should not be rejected, he enclosed it in an envelope and took it to Baba and without any other words asked Baba "Shall I send this"? Baba Said "Yes" He sent it, and it was accepted. Baba had his Antarjnan of the gift and had told Mahala's wife some hours earlier: "Tell your husband, Baba is coming to the house, and he should not reject Baba". So when the envelope with the 10 rupee note came, Mahlsapathy was sure that Baba's message referred to the envelope and he accepted it.

The snake infested Shirdi was full of danger to its inhabitants. One evening as Mahlsapathy was leaving Eaba's Mosque, Baba told him that he was likely to meet two thieves (snakes) on the way, and accordingly Mahlsapathy found one at his doorsteps and the other at the neighbouring house. One day Baba told him. 'When you return, come with a lamp, for you will find a thief at the gate'. Accordingly, Mahlsapathy came with a lamp in his hand, and found a snake at the gate, and cried out 'snake, snake'. The neighbours gathered and killed it.

Baba once warned him in general words, 'Don't put your back against the earth'. Not remembering this advice, and in his usual slovenly way, Mahlsapathy, having consumed too much of Burfi got giddy, sat on the floor, and losing his consciousness, glided down. He then was with his bare back on the ground He was dreaming or delirious and talking in his dream, keeping his legs stretched on

the bare earth all the time. When he returned to consciousness and sat awake, he found he could not bend his leg. His daughters had to massage his knees and legs, and thereafter he was able to walk upto Baba. When he arrived there, Baba told him, 'Did I not tell you not to put your back against earth?' On one occasion, Baba gave him warning that something wrong would happen at Khandoba's, and that, however, he need not be afraid as Baba would do the needful. Then very soon, his wife and daughter fell ill and soon after, the other members of his family also fell ill. This was after 1908, after which date the number of Shirdi visitors increased including many doctors. Meanwhile Baba told Mahlsapathy, 'Let the sick people keep to bed', and walking round his Mosque with a short stick in hand Baba was waving his short stick and using threatening words :—'Come, whatever may be your power, let us see! I shall show you what I can do with my chota stick, if you come out and face me'. This was Baba's treatment of the disease. However, amongst the numerous visitors, there were doctors who gave medicines to Mahlsapathy to be given to his sick family. Mahlsapathy consulted Baba regarding the medicines, but Baba dissuaded him from administering the medicines to the sick at home. In the result, all got well without medicine. Baba's way of fighting disease is not the modern way of medicine, but it was unmistakably effective.

Baba's watching was often of great benefit to Mahlsapathy in other domestic matters also. Once M's wife had gone to her mother's house at a distant village. When she was there, she developed a painful tumour near her-neck, but she did not communicate that to her husband. But Baba's watching eye of supervision, which rests on all those relying on him with loving trust, noted this fact. He told Mahlsapathy at Shirdi : 'Your wife has a tumour in the throat. None can cure it except myself, and I shall cure it'. Mahlsapathy knowing nothing about his wife's health simply said 'Yes, Baba'. Later he received a letter mentioning the painful tumour, and adding that it had been cured.

Baba used his knowledge of coming events for "Bhagat" as Baba called this *bhakta* Mahlsapathy, and revealed them to him when necessary. He was a poor man, whose three daughters were married to people at various villages. His

Sambandis (i.e. fathers-in-law of those daughters) had no regard for him. The reader may remember Lamb's essay on "A Poor Relation". On one occasion, one of the Sambandis at a distant village invited him to dine with him, and Mahlsapathy went to take Baba's leave. When granting leave. Baba said, "You are going to be insulted there'. Mahlsapathy went along with his friend, but when he went to his Sambandi's house, he found the Sambandi's people had already finished their meal and were washing their hands without caring to wait for the arrival of their poor relation Mahlsapathy. This was an obvious insult and he returned refusing to take his meal. He returned to Baba and told him all the facts.

On another occasion, one Ram Bhav Harde, a Sai Baba bhakta, invited Mahlsapathy to go to his village 'Astinagram' some six or ten miles away from Shirdi. There was to be a Mahlsapathy Purana reading by Mahhapathy to be followed by a dinner. So it was an interesting occasion, and Mahlsapathy went to take leave of Baba. Baba said, 'Do not go. There will be a fight there'. Yet having been invited, he could not avoid goiing, and he went to that village. He sat and read Mahlsapathy puraram there, and while that was going on the host's graceless, sturdy and rowdy boys with other boys sat for their meal and began to exchange hot words. From words they quickly came to blows with sticks, and on account of the free use of the cudgels, the audience that was present for the Purana reading fled in fright and Mahlsapathy also had to pack up his purana and follow their wise example. He returned to Shirdi and told Baba, 'Your words have proved true to the letter'.

Long before N. G. Chandorkar and others arrived, i.e. in the eighties of the last Century, Baba spoke of the future of Shirdi. Baba told Bhagat and others who were with him at the chavadi, 'In this place (Shirdi) there will be huge storeyed buildings rising, big fairs will be held, and big men, Subedars, and others will be coming. My Brahmins will gather and elephants, horses and Shankar Nana will also come' Guns will be fired (Dhadanga Dishe Udenga)'. People hearing this began to smile. They thought, 'What, all this for this worthless nook of an insignificani hamlet'. But some decades later, every one of Baba's statements came true, and that nook of an insignificant village has already

become a small town with big storied buildings, sugar factories with machinery, annual fairs, festivals, etc., and the daily puja of Baba attracts thousands including ladies and gentlemen of the highest position from all parts of India.

Baba knew the future of this devotee but gave him only hints. When Mahlsapathy got a male child in 1897 and took him to Baba and talked of Namakarana, i.e. the name to be given to the child, Baba, evidently to prevent his being too much attached to the son, told him "*Look after* the child for 25 years and that would be sufficient". The father's business is only to *look after* this new arrival in a detached spirit, knowing that the connection is only for a fixed time. Mahlsa did not understand all this, or that 25 years period indicated the length of his life which was to end in 1922; but with true humility and submission he told Baba that "looking after" the child was not in his power-but only in Baba's power. Baba's reply was still more significant. "Be thou, the Nimitta" i.e. the apparent instrument, said Baba, reminding us of Sri Krishna's direction to Arjuna to fight the MahaBharata battles as a mere instrument in His hands "Nimittamatram Bhava Savyasachin". Mahlsapathy though a surrendered soul could not have banished his ego and risen then to the full height indicated above i.e. to treat all acts done by his body as the acts of the Supreme. Baba was leading him on to that height on the above and other occasions.

But more interesting to common folk than this is Baba's keeping watch over him night and day. When Mahlsapathy often obtained leave of Baba to go for his night meal, Baba used to say, 'Go. I am with you.' No harm then befell M. Though Baba was not physically accompanying M, his invisible guardianship was evident.

Baba's watch over Mahlsapaty was also for his moral benefit. Though Mahlsapathy was generally of a pious disposition, sometimes he committed mistakes. Every night he used to feed a crippled bitch, and one day, having fed it, he said, 'Go', But the creature did not stir. He took a stick and gave it a beating, and then it howled with pain and ran away. That night when Mahlsapathy went to the Mosque and shampooed Baba's legs, Bapu Saheb, Dada Kelkar and others were with him. Baba said, 'Arre, there is a bitch, sickly like me, in the

village. Everybody is beating it'. Then at once Mahlsapathy, remembering his behaviour repented his mistake. This is not trivial, as we shall see further on.

Baba's company, Seva, example and help kept Mahlsapathy very high up in his spiritual level. He bore great love to Baba. When Baba passed away in 1918, he, on account of his attachment, declined all food and fasted for 13 days. Probably to prevent a shock, Baba had given him hints of his (Baba's) impending final departure. It was Mahlsapathy's custom to spend all his time with Baba except when he went for his meal, etc Later Baba would send some one or other to fetch him from his house. Then he would light up *chilm* (i.e. smoking pipe), do odd jobs for Baba, and prepare Baba's bed, which was a very peculiar arrangement. Baba always kept his head on an old brick (which is believed to be the brick given to him by Venkusa with a torn cloth). Madhav Fasle, a servant of Baba used to hand over that brick to Mahlsapathy every night and along with it, a tattered cloth (believed to be Venkusa's gift) to be placed over it and other cloths to be spread on the ground as bed for Baba. Mahlsapathy would first place the brick and then the tattered cloth, and then spread the other cloth or cloths. Ten or twelve days before 1918, Dassara, Madhav False, in handing over the brick, allowed it to slip down to the ground, and it broke into two. Then the broken pieces were placed as pillows for Baba. Baba asked 'Who broke the brick?' Mahlsapathy mentioned that Madhav False broke the brick. Baba got very angry with Madhav and placed his hands on his own head and felt extremely sad. Baba said 'Sopat tutali' i.e., the companion is broken. Next day, Kala (HS. Dixit) came and said there was no need to deplore the breaking, as he would join the pieces with silver joints. Baba said: "Even if you join them with gold, what is the use? *This brick is my Sobatya (companion)* (evidently from his Selu days) and its breakage betokens evil." From that time onwards Baba was dispirited. At least Mahlsapathy thought so. Baba, even before this, had given Mahlsapathy a hint. He told him once when he (Mahlsapathy) was preparing to light a lamp and fill up Baba's pipe, 'Arre Bhagat, in a few days from this, I will be going somewhere. After that, you come at night for 2 or 4 years'; This was not understood by Mahlsapathy. But Baba's spirit passed beyond our ken into AVYAKTA on 15th

October 1918, and Mahlsapathy was able to do his nightly usual puja to Baba only for 2 or 4 years, for he passed away on 11—9—1922.

Baba's help to Mahlsapathy in his religious efforts and in securing a good end may be noted, because dying on an Ekadasi day is conducive to or indicative of Sadgati. Mahlsapathy passed away, in circumstances to be described more fully later, on an Ekadasi day in 1922 after a life of religious striving. In the case of Mahlsapathy, his firm faith was in Khandoba, and Baba treated Khandoba, Vittoba, and Allah as the same c. f. BGIV 11 & VIII 21—All worship is God's worship. God reaches us in the form we choose.' Khandoba's grace to Mahlsapathy was manifested several times, and whenever there was a difficulty for Mahlsapathy, Khandoba gave him visions. In one of those visions, Khandoba asked him to go and see Vittal at Pandharpur, and in the case of such a poor man like Mahlsapathy, who had to beg his bread for himself and family, a pilgrimage to Pandharpur was no joke. But by Khandoba's grace, he got some pecuniary help for the journey, and a well-to-do family as his companions. With them he reached Pandhari. At Pandharpur, the crowds were always unmanageably large, and it was not easy for one to cut his way through the mass to Vittal. Then there were the professional priests demanding coins to take a man to the Vittal image. But Mahlsapathy had no coins, and so special interference on his behalf by Khandoba was necessary. As he was moving with the crowd nearer and nearer to Vittoba, suddenly people began to note that Mahlsapathy's face was exactly like Khandoba's and said that Khandoba had actually come to take darsan of Vittoba and cleared a way for him. The Pandas also must have been similarly impressed. That made Vittal darsan easy for Mahlsapathy.

Similar instances of help for himself and party were manifested at his pilgrimage to Jejuri. Once when they were going on their horses, the police intercepted them on the way and examined their passes. Finding one having no pass, they stopped him and put him into the police station; and the procession could not start from the village. That man had to go and get a pass from the Kulkarni. That Kulkarni showed his talent for taking work gratis from all persons. A Niti sloka says rightly :—Makshiko Maruto vescya yachako mushakas tatha

gramanirganakas chaiva saptaiate para badhakah". i.e gnats, winds, courtesans, beggars, rats, village headmen and karnams (i.e. kulkarnis) these seven are pestering parasites. He delayed the issue of a pass and said 'You go on splitting fuel for me'. He gave Mahlsapathy's man an axe to split fuel i.e. to do work gratis. Then the man took up the axe and after a few strokes, the handle was broken. Then the Kulkarni gave him a second handle. The second handle also broke. Then a third handle was given, and that also shared the same fate. Then the Kulkarni said, 'God does not allow you to work', and gave him the pass.

Baba's watch over the pilgrimages of Mahlsapathy and his other movements shows Baba's great and mysterious power and His wonderful love and guardian-stip of the bhaktas. These are well illustrated in many instances of which a few more may be mentioned, On one occasion when Mahlsapathy and party reached Jejuri, 150 miles from Shirdi, plague was raging there, and Mahlsapathy sat down dejected leaning against his palki (Kavadi), not knowing what to do. Suddenly he saw Baba behind him; and Baba vanished. Then he got emboldened and told his companions : 'Baba is with us and we need not worry'. Accordingly the pilgrimage was satisfactorily over, and there was no loss of life. When he returned to Shirdi, Baba told him, 'I found you leaning against the Palki at Jejuri'. Mahlsapathy was convinced that his eyes did not deceive him at Jejuri and that Baba was everywhere guarding his bhaktas.

On another occasion when Mahlsapathy and his group had gone for an annual Jejuri pilgrimage, they were returning followed by another group i.e. Malam Bhagat Pilki. Then they met thieves who were armed with axes and who wore masks or were covering their faces with thick blankets. As they approached the Palki to rob it, Mahlsapathy courageously took out a handful of Bhandar, i.e. coloured rice and sandal and threw it at them as prasad. Then they quietly retreated to an adjoining wood. Then Mahlsapathy and his friends went on followed by Malam Bhagat palki, and they noted that there was no image in their own palki. All the party looked into it (i.e., Mahlsapathy's palki) to see whether all their images were there. They found none. Then some one said. 'Are we to carry an empty palki to Shirdi?. That day was a Sunday, which is Khandoba's day. At

the very outset. M said, 'No pilgrimage on Sunday' But the others had disagreed, and now Mahlsapathy told the others, 'This is the evil of doing pilgrimage on Sunday'. Suddenly Mahlsapathy got in to a trance, and Khandoba talking through him said, 'Arre, what day is this? Is it not my day? Why are you carrying palki? To-day I am busy hunting out on a hill. After hunting is over, I will come to Shirdi. You had better go now'. Then he woke up from trance, and the palki went on and came to Khandoba's temple at Shirdi. People at Shirdi, for instance, Shakaram Kandukar and others came to the palki to take Darsan. Shakaram looked into the palki and found all the images 'there. 'What is the talk of all the images missing?' he asked the people. He showed them, and said 'Here are all the images'.

Mahlsapathy's case is an excellent instance of Baba's method of unifying religion and creeds successfully. Mahlsapathy was only an ordinary, conservative, orthodox worshipper of Khandoba. Sai Baba, he considered a Muslim and even objected to his entry into Khandoba's temple when Sai Baba came to Shirdi with Chan Bhai Patel's party. This same man became Baba's ardent devotee and worshipped him. In fact not only was he the first in point of time amongst the worshippers, but he was also the foremost in excellence. Mahlsapathy felt that Baba was God. Whatever may be the difference in name and form, Shanker, Scani, Ganapati, and Khandoba are all one, and Baba with divine power was the same. M also went to Pandharpur to worship Vittal (a form of Maha Vishnu and had no sectarian i.e. (Siva Vishnu) prejudices. He and his group honoured all saints, Hindu and Muslim, and they applied Tukaram's famous saying 'Jo Sant, Toch Dev! o Dev, Toch Sant', meaning 'God is the same as the Saint and the Saint is the same as God' to fakirs as well as Hindu saints. He was the first to do puja to Baba and even apply sandal to him. Baba's objection to his being worshipped in that fashion melted away under the keen sense of Mahlsapathy's love and devotion. As Mahlsapathy made no difference between Khandoba and Baba, and as all thoughts of men were known to Baba, Baba could not object to any of the ways adopted for worship at the Khandoba temple being applied to him. Baba's divine heart of love responded to the outpourings of Mahlsapathy's love; and so, Mahlsapathy became Baba's ANKITA

SISHYA. Baba said (if not expressly at least by unmistakable utterance and conduct). 'He is mine'. The Arati song says.

Jo Sanduchya *ankita* Jiva Jhala,

Tyacha Ase Bhara niranjanala.

This means, the devotee who is stamped as mine by a Sadhu, has no more burden or responsibility to bear, as all his burdens and responsibilities rest on the Saint (or the Guru God). Baba showed his assumption of responsibility in innumerable ways. Especially when he sent him in the evenings away from the Mosque, he would be saying 'Go, I am with you' i.e. *I will protect you.' And he did. Baba's cure of Mahlsapathy's wife's tumour at a distant place far off from Siiirdi, and the cure of her children of their disease at other times are excellent instances of Baba's protection and love. When the bhakta had no son, and yet refused to go and live with his family, it was Baba's repeated assurance that he would get a male child that induced him to go and sleep at home and thus get a son. This son is named Martanda and is still living and worshipping at his father's tomb. This is considered important, as dying without a son will take a man to Hell (Put Naraka). Mahlsapathy's response to Baba's love was evidenced by M's dedication of himself to Baba's service. Mahlsapathy not only shared his cloth bed with Baba every night at the Mosque and chavadi, but also shared his night vigil. Mahlsapathy's help to rouse Baba when the vigil stopped and gave way to natural sleep was a special help to Baba, and through Baba to everybody. Mahlsapathy's effort to keep the Baba body for three days in 1886 against the mischance of being buried on the compulsion of the officers was a signal service not only to Baba but to the entire Sai bhaktas and the public at large. Baba's recognition of this attachment closely resembling Hanuman's attachment to Rama was expressed by Baba's calling him Bhagat i.e. Bhakta. B. V- Dev calls Ma Bhakta Manickya and a Mahatma in his preface to M's reminiscences. Both epithets are apt and just.

The end of such a soul when life passes away must necessarily be a good end, (sadgati). Baba made this assurance doubly sure and granted him the merit of dying on an Ekadasi day (with God in his mind and on his lips) just as he did

this for several other bhaktas of his. Dying on an Ekadasi day is conducive to departure in a holy mood from this life (through the bright and smokeless path). B, Gita VIII 6 says.

Yam yam vapi Smaran Bhavam

Tyajati ante kalebaram

Tarn tam eva eti kounteya

Sada tad bhava bhavitah

That is 'Whatever a person thinks of (being in constant touch with it) at the time of death he reaches'. When Mahlsapathy's death was approaching, he retained full-consciousness and control of his mind. That was on 11th Sep. 1922 Monday (in the month of Badrapada, Ekadasi Somavara, sacred to Shiva and Khandoba) Having finished all his puja, he said to his family, 'To-day is my father's Shraddha day. Finish cooking soon. To-day I close my earthly life and go to Heaven'. So, Laxman, the Brahmin, came and finished the Sraddha at once and finished the gift of balis to crows, cows, etc, and guests were fed. Then the family meals were finished. Mahlsapathy took betel and nuts after his meal. After chewing a bit, he put on a *kupni*. Having near him, Bala Gurav, Ramachandra Kothe, etc., he told them ;all to do *Ramachandrajapa* Japa went on. His son was there, and he gave him his stick. Muhlsapaty said to his son, 'Spend time piously in Uttama Bhakti Marga i.e. in holy devotion. All that I told you will happen." Then Mahlsapathy uttered the word '*Ram*' and breathed his last. Thus he passed away in calm faith and cheerfulness on the 11th September 1922. This death was a fitting termination to a pure, lofty and dedicated life—a life of Love, faith and total surrender— a death that may be envied by many who may not be prepared to adopt the rigorous course that led up to it and ensured it. His remains are interred in a tomb at Shirdi which is still worshipped by many.

Some may fancy that merely rebuking Mahlsapathy for mercilessly hitting a bitch for not moving out when told to go is a mere ordinary lesson in *Ahimsa* or fair treatment of brutes. But from the standpoint of Baba's development of pupils, it is much more. Any one who is capable of hitting a bitch naturally thinks poorly of a bitch and highly of himself, and does not hesitate to injure a "lower creature".

This is not merely a vice but evidence of Rajasic Tamasa obscuring the soul's light-a very serious obstacle to the attainment of equal vision, c.f. (1) Somatvam yogauchyate (2) Nirdosan hi *samam* Brahman Tasmāt Brahmani te sthilah BGV. 19 to the attainment of 'Sarvabhutatma bhutatmatvam', that is, realising God or the Self in every creature and paying reverence to it. BGV. 7. First, about equal vision, it will be noted that alike In the B Gita and Krishnoddhava Samvada, (SBXI) *samatva* of Equal View is repeatedly stressed as a qualification for and a mark of the Jnani. If a man has realised Brahman (i e. got Jnana), then all creatures are alike Brahman, and he treats them all equally and makes no invidious distinctions between them, worshipping one, beating another, etc. Vidya Vinaya sampanno Brahmane Gavi hastini Scuni chaiva Scvapakecha Panditah Samadarsinah. BGV. 18. The want of *samatva* denotes a failure to rise above vulgar mediocrity; and beating shows the need for a great deal of effort to rise to heights of equal vision. Equal vision is sometimes considered a mere poetical ideal which is not practical-Many may think it not worthwhile, when they are in active life, when still living in the family, to aim at equal, vision-samatva. But Baba did not take that view. Mahlsapathy was a family man, '*grihasta*' living with his family up to the last and died in the midst of his relations, Yet Baba raised him nearer and nearer to the level of equal vision, and the first step in that effort is to stop cruelty to animals. So his warning against the beating of the bitch must be viewed in the light of the need for achieving equal vision. Higher steps are not achieved merely by stopping the beating of animals. Higher steps are accelerated by Baba's highest plank, namely, seeing of Himself or God in all creatures: *Sarvabhutatma bhutatmatvam*. That is Baba wanted his highest bhaktas to feel strong enough about his (Baba's) being God. They should feel his being in all animals and consequently God being in all animals, a result which should be manifested by either mental or even actual physical worship offered to some animals at any rate. Namdev's recognition of Vittal in a dog, after he had been trained by the Guru Visoba Kesar in equal vision and in the treatment of all objects as manifestation of God, has already been mentioned in the previous volume, Mahlsapathy was the best fitted to gain that faculty of seeing (Sai) God

in a creatures or to sing or feel with Kabir "Sabghata Atma Rama Govinda-Hari Bole Hari Bole Bhai". In the Bhagavata recognising the difficulty of actual physical worship being offered to all creatures, the advice is given that the worship may be mental, and the stanza runs—

Manasaiva etani bhutani

Pranamet Bahumanayan

Iswaro Jiva kalayo

Pravishto Bhagavaniti

This means, 'Remembering the fact that all these creatures have an Atma or Soul and that the Soul is but the reflection or part of God, one should feel that God is in all these creatures, esteem them and worship them only *mentally*'. It is not known whether Mahlsapathy, Chandokar, or any other devotee actually did this worship as a sadhana when he met creature after creature or any creature or succeeded in feeling that God's reflection, that is, God Himself in another form was in every creature. But this was evidently Baba's intention, and one might presume that some of the bhaktas of Baba did achieve a fairly high degree of progress in this sadhana. One Lakshmi going to Baba's tomb, shortly after He passed away, was bemoaning his loss and prayed to him to show his form to her. As she was moving out, she met a serpent on her way. At once she cried out, 'Baba, if you show me your form in this serpent shape, how am I to get on?' This is an interesting instance. If even a rustic woman, not presumed to know anything about higher culture or the higher sadhanas in the Sastras was able to recognise or treat Baba as being in a snake, surely other bhaktas of Baba may be presumed to have made some advance in this all important matter. The great importance of this step of recognising God in all creatures can be inferred from the fact that the lesson is repeated more than a dozen times in the Bhagavata Gita and in the Ekadasa Skanda of Bhagavata i.e. Uddhava Gita. Naturally the utterance in the Upanishad 'Sarvam kaluidam Brahma', that is, 'All this manifested Universe is God' cannot be achieved by one who fails to go even through the first step, namely, treating the living creatures in the Universe as manifestations of God. God is power plus mercy, plus sameness, or equality and

omniscience and omnipresence. One can magnify the bits of these qualities found in animals and treat them as potentially infinite or as tiny reflections of Godhead. So one ought to first view the creatures around him as manifestations of God, and their bodies as temples (Deho Devalayah Proktah Sivo Jivah Sanatanah) and mentally reverence them. The practical difficulties of reverencing all creatures and observing equality of vision have been referred to by great saints like Sri Ramakrishna and solutions have been given by them for practice to overcome such difficulties. If a tiger is to be treated as God, when it is coming to attack one, It will be over with the man, and there is no further sadhana practicable for him. So one has to keep the tiger or lion (Mriga-namcha mrigendroaham BGX, 30-) at a distance and mentally reverence it, overcoming one's fear as part of one's sadhana, no doubt taking good care to see to one's safety. The same applies to snakes and other destructive creatures. Amongst human beings also there are unfortunate specimens of uttermost heights of vice and cruelty and other and unsociable features, and these cannot be approached by any ordinary sadhaka. A Chaitanya may no doubt go out and beard the lion in his den and meet the murderous robber in his own haunt and may come off victorious, but that, however, cannot be copied safely by ordinary sadhakas. Hence, one may stress the word '*Mansaiva*' in the above quotation from the Bhagavata with reference to this practice.

After reverence is achieved, then comes the question of identity. Sri Sai Baba, the highest realiser and teacher of Brahma Nishta, viewed everything as Brahman. 'I am Brahman; all this is Brahman; I am all' said Sai, as a great realiser that he was might be expected to say. As a stepping stone to that position, reverence to all is an important achievement and that reverence is made possible by the Ahimsa lesson taught by Baba to Mahlsapathy, This is the chief recorded lesson in Mahlsapathy's memoirs taken down by his son to his dictation, but one may be sure that when Mahlsapathy lived for four or five decades at least along with Baba, day and night, in the Masudi and Chavadi, up to the last moment of Baba's earthly life, numerous other instances of ahimsa and view of creatures as manifestations of God and identification of oneself with

all that is, must have occurred and must have been noticed by Mahlsapathy to his great advantage. Mahlsapathy however was not a cultured man and the few memoirs that he dictated at the fag end of his life to his less cultured son show that he had no neat power even of recalling, arranging, and narrating-all his experiences. Taking, for example, the account he gives of Baba's *Svecha marana* and return to the body in 1886, we see how poor his powers of narration are and perhaps also his powers of observation understanding and remembering incidents after 36 years passed. Anyhow, Mahlsapathy, after so many decades of his living with Baba. would surely have imbibed Baba's ahimsa and Baba's regard for life in every form. Incidentally one may note that it is not merely worship of creatures that is required for ore's equal vision and rising' to the '*Sarvam kaluidam Brahma*' plane. The inanimate world also including the mineral world must be treated as Brahman e, g. the earth, mountains, etc, B G. VII-47, Here comes the difficulty. How is one to treat a clod of earth as Brahman. One may retort, 'Are not persons worshipping a handful of clay moulded into the shape of an elephant faced Ganapati or of Kali for days and days, (though after Prana Pratishta ceremony) and feeling the presence of God in that object every year. If one can feel God in clay in a particular form, one may next proceed to view the same clay with-out that form us still being God, even when the clay has been thrown into the Ganges. It must be recalled that earth, air, fire, water, and ether, (which are parts of God's Apra Prakriti. B. G, VII 4 & 5) are all full of life, in some form or other, Life grades down from the human to the animal, thence into the vegetable, thence into the mineral life, and finally into the siderial life. It is easy for one acquainted with animal life, (from the science of physiology or Biology) to note vegetable life dealt with by the science of Botany. In studying these sciences, one notes that there are hybrid or indeterminable entities which one finds it difficult to bring under either of the heads specifically. There are some cells or objects which look like vegetables in one respect and animals in another; for instance, the fly eating flower, which catches at the fly as soon as it sits on it, dissolves it in its acid secretion and digests it exactly like an animal. Yet all the while it is only a plant, a vegetable. When vegetables eat animals, just as

animals eat vegetables, it is difficult to say that there is not the same life in both. Taking up cell and crystal life, it is very difficult to distinguish the mineral, the animal, and the human. Man is supposed to be able to draw geometrical figures, but the crystals beat man in their aesthetic perception and their unerring geometrical faculty of building up correct crystals even when intercepted. And beyond all mineral, there is the siderial life on which light is thrown by the recent ray research and atomic or nuclear fission. All objects known to us are : supposed to consist of atoms. 'A' (not), 'tomas' (to cut) is the derivation of the word 'atom', and the older chemists believed that matter goes down to a stage where it cannot be further cut, and that, they called the atom, But that atom has now been cut and nuclear fission reveals to us that inside a cell of an atom, what is contained is a Universe, protons and electrons of various sorts gyrating round and round and producing different results by their varieties of combination or position. The power generated by cutting an atom of uranium or hydrogen now threatens the peace and safety of the world and the gamma rays produced in the operation are the biggest Yama that science has revealed, more terrific than the Yama of Hindu mythology. The world's end, Pralaya, which is merely poetically described in Puranic Mythology is now an actual terrible spectre across the path of scientists and statesmen. Anyhow it is now scientifically proved that there is life in even the least bit of the Universe and, if power and intelligence be regarded as basic elements in God. worship of plant or the mineral is quite as easy as worship of the animal or the human being,

It is unsafe to generalise from a few facts of science and draw conclusions in the field of religion, but on the whole following Baba's guidance, one is safe in drawing the conclusion that, the Upanishidic declaration 'Sarvam kaluidam Brahma, and the Puranic direction that all creatures ought to be worshipped, are perfectly safe and legitimate for one to follow, under proper guidance. Mahlsapathy had the immense advantage of the company and guidance of Sai Baba and that was more than a University training for him, for it enabled him to rest securely on Baba's help and support for all his religious strivings and for life in general. When he died with "Ram" on his lips, it is quite clear that Mahlsapathy

had conquered his baser nature and advanced very far in his spiritual welfare under the guidance of Baba. Who has achieved more ?

While closing this chapter, we may stress certain points once again. An account of Mahlsapathys training under Sai Baba may serve other purposes while noting the grand truths just stated. Some very orthodox people think that either it is impossible for them to use Sai Baba for their religious advancement as he was so heterodox and apparently a Muslim or that, in any case, there is no particular benefit to be gained by contact with him (Sai Baba) for the highly orthodox people to whom the Supreme Authority the Vedas, the Agamas, and the methods mentioned therein serve all the purposes that they can think of. With their sanctimony of acharas, pujas, and dhyana. they think that nothing more is left for them to do. Several orthodox gentlemen have asserted that Sai Baba cannot be of any use to them at all. Mahlsapathy's life and development under Sai Baba serve to prove the contrary. Those who are highly content with the steps they are taking in the orthodox direction with the use of their ancestral methods, images, etc., will find that Mahlsapathy also was a person of the same sort. If Mahlsapathy could derive very high benefit from Baba, others also can. Mahlsapathy had his Khandoba worship and Khandoba image inherited from his parents. Khandoba is an Avatar of Siva, and he had implicit faith in Khandoba and his religious practice was strict. His observance of fasts, feasts, and ceremonies was almost perfect. He had developed some powers such as leading the Khandoba purana and with its help informing people of Khandoba's message or reading for the future. He felt fully convinced that Khandoba was protecting him in everything. In short he had such intense faith in Khandoba that really Khandoba developed into a fairly perfect idea of God for him. As the Vedas point out, and as Baba also frequently pointed out, any name or form of God would become the perfect God that one needs. "Namaste Vayo." 'Tvameva Pratyaksham Brah-masi' is what the Vedic worshipper of Vayu said to Vayu. *i. e.* Obeisance to Thee, Wind-God! You alone are the Visible embodiment of Divinity (to me)." He found that the worship of Vayu, which is only one of the Forces of Nature, if carried on long enough and with sufficient

intensity, served his purpose, Similarly worshippers of Ganapati and other forms also thought that each form could be developed into full God under proper circumstances when the fullest *blaze* of devotion, faith and receptivity ensouled the devotee. In Mahlsapathy's case this was very well illustrated. He up to the last stuck to Khandoba and Khandoba protected him. Baba used the term Khandoba to mean God. For instance when addressing Upasani Baba, who was living in Khandoba temple, Baba said, 'After four years' service, Khandoba will give all his powers and make you perfect'. In the case of Mahlsapathy, his increased perfection was getting more and more patent to those associated with him. The heights of self-sacrifice that he reached were most astounding. His selflessness, which was copied by his wife and daughters, resulted in their being left them without the barest necessities, in some cases such as a woollen cover (Kambli). Yet he kept cheerful, contented and ready to crush out self-interest to protect others even if they should viciously work against his interest. Here is an instance reminding us of the Palestine Samartha's advice to do good to those who do evil and to give the person robbing you of a coat your cloak also.

When M lost his kambli and that was traced to a receiver of stolen property in another village where his daughter, who was there, traced it, that receiver swore that it was hers and not Mahlsapathy's. The Village Munsif said that she ought to be jailed and the property recovered. Mahlsapathy was shocked at the idea of seeing a woman jailed and tormented for the sake of recovering his "kambli", and so said he would not claim the property or say it was his—just as the saintly Bishop refused to claim the silver candle stick stolen by Jean Val Jean in Les Miserables.

Some people may fancy that self-abnegation carried to such severe extent may ruin the physical and material well being of the devotee and those depending on him. But here comes the service of Baba. Baba, the watchful the all knowing Providence who was always with him wherever he went, made sure that he and his dependants should not be irreparably damaged by his development of virtues, and therefore in every incident he came off safe. This will suffice to show that even for very orthodox people great help is derived in

proceeding on their accustomed lires of religious development by being in contact with or under the protection of the guardian angel Baba or rather of Sai Krishna who undertook to provide everything needed "Yoga Kshemam (B.G, IX 22). Even very orthodox and very devout persons would note how useful it is to have all one's affairs about body and family looked after by an omniscient, omnipresent and kind guardian. Several orthodox people fancy that God is looking after them and their families but are disappointed to note the absence of any provision in several cases. Such persons would gladly note that by resorting to Sai they find the same God that they have been appealing to comes under a new name ready to serve them and their purposes. God fulfils Himself in many ways.

YE yatha Maam Prapadyante.tams tathaiva bhajamyaham
Mama vartma Anuvartante manushyam partha sarvascha
Yo yo yam yam tanum bhaktam
Labhata cha tatah Kaman Mayaiva vihitam

BG VII(7)21-2

is what Sri Krishna said in the Gita. This means, In whatever from people surrender to Me, in that very form, I serve them. Every one following his own form of worship is really following My worship'. God can be approached under any name and in any manner, and Mahlsapathy, though sticking to the idea that Khandoba was his God, derived the advantage of getting all his other needs safeguarded and provided as far as possible by Baba acting as his Providence. Other bhaktas also who have their own particular forms, who however note the need or importance of food, shelter and other things for themselves and their families being provided by Baba, would be thus encouraged by Mahlsapathy's example to seek Baba and place themselves under his protection. Baba never interfered with anybody's orthodoxy or religious worship, and the orthodox now in various places need not have any fears about the loss of their existing spiritual position by contacting Baba. All the while, they would get unconscious expansion and refinement of their idea of God and gods, and become ready for reaching the "Ekam Sat".

Some of the readers of this sketch of Mahlsapathy may envy him in respect of his holy service to tie Guru & the resultant benefits both temporal and spiritual, and exclaim almost in the words of Thyagaraja,

(Mukhan-Rupaka)

Ehtanine Varnimtunu Sabari Bhagvamu

(or Bhakta Bhagyamu)

(i.e. How can I describe how great was the good fortune of Sabari, a hunter class hill tribe woman, who served and gave offerings to Sri Rama and thereby attained Moksha?)

But such envy and despair of emulating this Bhakta ought to be more usefully diverted into active channels of *service* of Sai Baba, who is still with us and carrying on his divine plan of helping people to attain virtue and Moksha. This book would be written in vain, if even a handful of readers or listeners are not hereby inspired to rise high in their devotion and service (to sai in any form, or he has all forms of Krishna, Rama Siva Marutyadi c.f. Ashtottara Namavali)

In concluding this chapter one more observation may be made throwing some light upon Baba's methods and ways. Mahlsapathy undoubtedly made a good end. In fact, he was fully conscious and knew when death was approaching, and told his friends 'I am going to Heaven'. He was fully conscious of the merit he had stored up as a Khandoba bhakta who had read Khandoba purana times without number, and made numerous pilgrimages to Jejuri, etc. What did Mahlsapathy mean when he said that he was going to Heaven at death? Readers will remember that when any pious man's death is announced, it is said that he has become a Kailasavasi if he is a Saivaite or Vaikuntavasi if he is a Vaishnavaita, that is, he has gone to the feet of the particular god whom he worshipped, which god is dwelling in Heaven, each god having his own Heaven. Siva has Kailas for His Heaven and Vishnu has Vaikunta. Jehova would have his own and other gods would have their own. In experience, the difference between these may be practically nothing, but yet most people believe that each Heaven is a place, separate from other Heavens, The Gita refers to these ideas and ideal; in Chapter VII, verses 20 to 23, which are worth deep study and cogitation

at the hands of every serious reader. First we shall mention what Mahlsapathy's ideas were as to his god and his Heaven, Mahlsapathy unwaveringly believed in the supremacy and power of his Ishta Devata, namely, Khandoba, who was a particular god in a particular place with a particular Form of bliss. When he tried to propitiate Khandoba by carrying his image in a palki with others, 150 miles to Jejuri and back, on a Sunday, he declared 'Our Khandoba does not want procession, he is out to-day being a Sunday enjoying himself with hunting on some hills', Therefore, his notion of Khandoba, in whome his soul was concentrated, was a god that delighted in hunting and wanted a particular hill on a particular day and so had a particular locality or Heaven in which he would be rejoicing and his bhaktas would rejoice with him. This is more or less the outline or rough explanation of what Mahlsapathy meant by saying that he would go to Heaven on the day of his death. No doubt he worshipped Vittal, Scani, Ganapati, and Baba- But none of them deeply entered into his soul and captured him like Khandoba. They were all fit to be worshipped or respected like the relations of a husband whom a woman respects though it is only the husband whom she embraces. The exact connection between one god and another, the exact definition of our divine ideas, is not possible at least to most persons in ordinary circumstances. Accepting, current Hindu, Christian and other ideas, we might state that Khandoba was Mahlsapathy's chief God though in a way, he recognised that Sankar, Scani, etc., were also Gods and should be respected. Adopting current ideas we would be entitled to say that perhaps Khandoba was Mahlsapathy's God in the sense in which Bhagavad Gita uses the term 'god' in verses 20 to 23 of Chapter VII. In verse 20 the Gita points out how by strong desire based perhaps upon innumerable repetitions or habit, one's ideas are pulled away in the direction of worshipping one particular god other than Lord Krishna or the Supreme. The Prakriti or Nature (formed by habit) compels these persons to be at their particular god other than Krishna. In verse 21 Lord Krishna says, far from objecting to this, he approves and seals this attitude. Whichever Murti (all Murtis are -but forms of the Supreme) a devotee wishes to

worship with faith in it, the Lord develops his faith therein. Verse 22 adds 'with that faith that devotee pleases that god and obtains particular gains or desires of his, and these are according to the order of the Supreme.' Verse 23 adds 'At death, those who worship particular gods go unto them, and those who worship the Supreme in the form of Krishna go unto Him.' We may infer from the above that so long as a man makes a difference between the Supreme and his Ishta Murthi and insists upon following the particular form suited to gain his Ishta Murti's favour, he goes in the end to the feet of his Ishta Murti which, of course, is Heaven, Heaven being a relative term which would apply to the position or level occupied by any of the gods. Therefore when Mahlsapathy said that he was going to Heaven, he had undoubtedly Khandoba at the back of his mind and was reaching Khandoba. After all, as Baba made no difference between Khandoba and the Supreme and also added. 'I am God,' i.e. Aham Brahmasmi', Baba is the same as Khandoba. When a man goes on unconsciously differentiating between one form of God and another, whether that is harmful or less advantageous is not a question that need be discussed here. As stated in the Gita, when a man starts all right, he goes ultimately to the Supreme. From the Upanishads one sees that those who go according to the lines of Kramamukti go on from loka to loka till they gain Brahman or Brahma loka that is, till they reach the Supreme. Tai U II (8) Brih U ch. VI (2) 13-16. These are highly abstract and metaphysical or theological distinctions and discussions. Some readers may not like to have any of such discussions while others may want them very much. That is why the matter is raised at all and why it is left not fully discussed in this paragraph. To understand Sai Baba aright, we have to study all phases of the bhakta at all his stages and even his final stage. The end reached by Mahlsapathy and that reached by H.S.Dixit and some others are briefly set fourth in this volume. Some readers might try to analyse these and see what Baba's methods are in developing a devotee and leading him on to the supreme end. It is not necessary now to decide whether Mahlsapathy reached the Supreme end in 1922 or at any any later date.

Nahi Kalyanakrit kaschit Durgatim Tata Gachchati

That is, 'No one following the right path need fear that he would attain-a bad end. There is God, Lord Krishna or Lord Sai to see to it that everyone reaches the right end'. We are sure of that, and this analysis only helps those who wish to have some more light or religious speculation or discussion to satisfy themselves. We should never dogmatise on these matters—especially when the account given of the various lokas in the above and other Upanishads and the Itihasas and puranas are so puzzling and apparently irreconcilable.