

CHAPTER VIII

Succession to Sai's Seat

The question has several times been raised whether Sri Sai Baba arranged for and left a successor to his position. He was Guru on certain lines to vast numbers of people who looked to him at Shirdi for governing their entire lives. Naturally one would expect that such a person with such vast and mighty power would provide his devotees with some means for their future guidance. Usually a Guru forms a Math or an Ashram and trains up, some time before he passes away, a pupil and even introduces him to those dependent on that Math or Ashram. This has been done time and again in various Maths (following the example of Yuvaraja being put in charge of the kingdom by the retiring Raja). This is necessary in the case of Rajas who leave vast possessions and who have definite policies to follow in respect of friends, enemies, neutrals, etc. In the case of several Maths and Ashrams, they are really similar to kingdoms, because they own properties and have their own policies in respect of various classes of their dependents, followers, and adherents and their own philosophical tenets to propagate. In respect of Sri Sai Baba, however, the most noticeable point is that he never tolerated the idea of forming a Math or an Ashram and treating himself as the head of it. In the exuberant enthusiasm of some devotees, since the arrival of Radhakrishna Aji in 1908, Sri Sai Baba, much against his will, was made to have a durbar with all the pomp and paraphernalia of kingship and with some properties at least which are necessitated by such pomp, etc. There was, therefore, a set of properties resembling regalia. But Baba's attitude towards them was not that of an owner rejoicing in the possession or proprietorship of his properties. On the other hand, he was '*Alipta*' a real fakir in regal roles. He persistently declined to put on a crown, to put on costly robes, and to get upon any palanquin, especially a silver palanquin, or have anything to do with silver articles. He had an utter disregard for wealth. Wealth was necessary for society no doubt, but, in his condition, his necessities of life were sufficiently provided by

his bhiksha dharma, that is true *fakiri*. He went out and stood in four or five places in the village, outside houses and shouted out, '*Pora Pori*', that is, 'boys and girls! *Roti Dhal lav*', that is, bring bread, etc. People from a number of houses invariably provided him with pieces of flat cakes (which he would carry in his cloth) and poured liquids containing lentils, etc., all together in one 'tumbrel' or tin pot. These formed his meal up to the last day of his life on earth.

Occasionally when he was too ill himself to go, he commissioned some devotee present to go out and do this Bhiksha dharma, the begging for him, and the naivedya was brought. For instance, Vaman Rao Prangovind Patil, B.A., LL.B., and G. G. Narke, M.A., M.Sc., were sent out by him to go and do the begging for him when he was unable to go out. Therefore, there was absolutely no need for him to keep any cash or buy anything for his food, and as for his bed, that was on the ground first and later he lay on a rough and cheap mattress called Gadi, with a few clothes spread thereon. These were all the minimal needs, and Baba had no other needs. Therefore Baba had no property and felt no necessity for any property. Yet devotees insisted on getting a horse, a car (ratha), silver palanquin with silver ornaments fixed to them, silver sticks to be carried in front of him, mace, whisks fitted on to silver sticks, etc. Polished tiles and chandeliers, artificial garden and Moons were used to decorate his chavadi, and thus he was made to appear like an aristocrat or royal person. Finally to oblige his overenthusiastic devotees, he fell into their humour, and then money was essential to run a royal court, a big Maharaja's durbar, and he began asking for large sums of money from those who would give it and who were even anxious to give it. Thus his monthly income exceeded that of a Provincial Governor. These would constitute his property but his vairagya came in the way. Every morning he would begin with zero and everyday he would scatter away the entire collection the same evening, and nothing would remain fit to be called his property. He would not have a bank balance or investment on mortgages, etc., and there was no such thing as a possession or property for him. So, there was no necessity for him to leave an heir or successor as kings and several maths do. When he passed away, he left only Rs. 16 in his pocket just enough to

purchase a coffin and bury his body. So far as the *Regalia* were concerned, an Association took charge of them in 1916 on the death of Radhakrishna, and Baba did not own them or care for them. When some silver horses attached to the palanquin were stolen and devotees complained of it to Baba, Baba's remark was 'Why was not the whole palanquin stolen?'

Some people naturally thought that he must have a successor to carry on his tradition.

Once upon a time Sai Baba seems to have had an idea that somebody might be found to carry on his Guru Parampara. Rao Bahadur H.V. Sathe in his statement says that some people asked him, 'Baba, are you going to leave the world without entrusting your full powers and possessions to anyone?' Then, according to Sathe, Baba's reply was, 'What? Will there not be some man coming?' That is all. That coupled with Baba's treatment of Sri Kasinath Upasani Maharaj from 1911 onwards made some people believe at that time that Sri Sai Baba hoped that Kasinath Maharaj or Upasani Baba could be developed into his successor, having all his nature and powers, and being able to give all the help to persons accustomed to get their help from Sri Sai Baba. Sri Sai seems to have hoped no doubt in 1911-12 that Sri Kasinath would receive the full impress of Sai personality by perfect laya or merger in him and that on the expiry of four years from Sravan or July 1911, that is, by July 1915, he would be completely transformed into God, filled with Khandoba's grace, absolutely rid of his (Kasinath's) old vasanas, and perfectly prepared to continue Sai's work. So, Sai said, to him, 'Do nothing', (which means, 'Be receptive'). 'Stay in Khandoba's temple doing nothing for four years. Then you will be the recipient of Khandoba's full grace, that is, you will get all his powers, and Shama will come and pull you out of Khandoba's solitude and I will place you in the open. That is, your divinity will be recognised by all and every one will come and worship you as the Gurudeva¹. That might have been Sai Baba's hope in the beginning at any rate. For Baba's Guruparampara the sishya has to absorb the Gurudeva's soul into himself by concentrated love forgetting the entire world beside. This was possible for Sai at his early age of five when he contacted his Gurudeva and continued to

serve him for 10 or 12 years with concentrated love. Baba says that he loved nothing in the world except the Guru and if the Guru was not there, he wondered what his eyes were for. That is a romantic attachment to the Guru and an ability to banish all worldly thought unconnected with the Guru. But this was not possible for any person other than Baba, and especially for persons who have already dipped themselves into the world deep enough.

In the case of Kasinath Maharaj, he came into contact with Sai Baba for such training, only at the age of 41. He had already had two wives, was living with a third wife and had developed disease. And he was anxious for the cure of the disease to resume his domestic life with her wife and continue his position in his family. He had his attachments and there was no particular reason why he should not have his worldly affections. The idea of being completely absorbed in God and forgetting all things except the Guru all day long was totally foreign to Upasani Baba as to so many other aspirants and sadhakas. It was to some extent adopted by him during the three years of his stay with Baba, for then, whatever sufferings he had only made him think of Baba, and in any case Baba was very close to him, and Baba looked after his safety, and there was plenty of mental and unseen contact with Sai Baba. ²¹Kasinath himself had been ordered not to go and meet Sai Baba in person, but there were many persons like Chidambaram Pilai, Kamalakar Dixit, and others who went both to Sai Baba and to Upasani Baba. He was constantly hearing about Sai Baba, and thinking naturally only of Baba when at Shirdi. Other objects were kept out of his mind by life at Shirdi especially under Sai's care. So, to some extent, his mind was directed to Sai Baba, and Baba used every opportunity for developing

²¹ * BCS 40. Night and day. I think and think of my people. I con their names over and over again.

To S.B. Dhumal.— Bhau. the whole of last night I had no sleep. I lay thinking and thinking of you.

At every step, I have to take care of you. Else, what will happen to you, God knows!

Kasinath's soul even through his misfortunes. However, the course prescribed by Sai Baba, namely, thinking only of Sai Baba, was not fully possible even at Shirdi. Kasinath's contact with outside persons could never be obliterated.

Mischievous young persons tortured him. Jealous persons were scandalizing him. A few admirers came and paid their homage to him. He told stories to some of them, and lectured to some others. He kept on his old intellectual lines of advance and wrote out 17 excellent Sanskrit stanzas in 1912 in praise of Sai Baba. He kept up his intellectuality and his learning as important assets. For Sai's course, intellectuality was not wanted. It was an obstacle. One must forget that he is learned and a master of Sanskrit or other language, which would all raise his Egoism, *Abhimana*. One must begin with oneself as a thorough zero, and think of, and work in respect of, Baba and nothing but Baba. This was achieved by Baba at Selu but was not possible in the case of Sri Upasani Maharaj at Shirdi (and was totally impossible after escaping from Shirdi). He could not forget his sorrows and think of Sai Baba in such a way as to deaden his feelings towards harassing events and incidents even when living at Shirdi.

In order, perhaps, to help him to regain some degree of assurance in the midst of all his troubles and fear of approaching death, Sai Baba started Upasani's worship on the 15th July 1913. He sent Chandra Bai Borkar to Khandoba's temple to worship Upasani in exactly the same way in which she and others worshipped Sai Baba himself. So, she brought her plateful of puja *samans*, and started doing puja to Kasinath. She pulled out his leg, wanted to clean it, paint it with turmeric, etc., and place sandal paste, etc. But Upasani objected. He did not want the worship. He wished to be left alone and he had no idea as to the real significance of Baba's sending that lady to worship him. The significance of that puja was that from that day onwards, Kasinath was fully earmarked as a Guru to be worshipped by people and to have no more sense of ownership--or anything personal in his body or reputation. He existed or should exist like Gods, images, etc. for the public and only for the public. It is with that

idea that Chandra Bai was sent up. When Kasinath objected, the lady, however, with her strong hands pulled out his legs, did the puja for them, waved a camphor lamp before him, carried a cup of milk to his mouth as naivedya. etc., and told him that his body was not his but belonged to the public. This cup he dashed down and angrily forbade her from coming again to worship him. That no doubt stopped the puja for a time. Very few persons at Shirdi were as sincerely and earnestly anxious to worship Upasani as Chandra Bai did. But a few did exist, and a few of them did go to Kasinath at Khandoba's temple and tried to worship him. But as fate would have it, Nanavali, a sturdy half-crazy ascetic, used to come and disturb the puja. When others threw flowers at Upasani, he threw dirt. When others offered stotra, he offered abuse, insult, and vilification, and once even tied up Upasani with a rope to a pillar, and danced and romped about, treating Upasani with utter contempt. This was all gall and wormwood to Sri Upasani. He might not care very much for worship. But he resented very much his being humiliated in the presence of his devotees. There was however no way of escape. Nanavali was a sturdy stout person ready to do violence to any one on the slightest provocation. Nanavali regarded Upasani with the same feelings as several of the Shirdi villagers, namely, that he was bringing discredit and danger to Sri Sai Baba, and Nanavali very much wished to get rid of Upasani (as he wanted to get rid of H.V. Sathe) from Shirdi. And it must be admitted that he was successful in achieving his object in both cases. The pestering which Kasinath had from Nanavali and the Muhammadan boys and others was so unbearable that in July 1914, one year after his puja was started, Kasinath could not any longer endure his stay at Shirdi. and he determined to cut short his serving Baba at Shirdi. What was miraculously started in June-July 1911 came to a very abrupt and unfortunate end in the sishya's running away from his Guru without even going to see him. If he had gone to see him, he might have been prevented from leaving Shirdi in 1914, just as he was prevented in 1911. For one reason or another, Kasinath avoided seeing Sai Baba, and with the help of Dr. Chidambaram Pilfai and his friend Dr. Ganpat Rao of Sindhe, effected his escape (nocturnally) from Shirdi and stayed away for over a year visiting various places.

Once he left Shirdi, his thoughts and plans were all his own. They were not directed to Sai Baba, or by Baba, and his own original ideas were running on lines totally different from Sai Baba's, and they were running away at a tangent from Sai Baba's²².

So, after July 1914, Sri Kasinath Upasani Maharaj visited Sindhe, Nagpur, and Kharagpur, and there achieved fame through his moral tales, pravachanas, and by his strict vairagya. The seeds sown in July 1913 of his worship by Chandra Bai bore ample fruit in 1915 at Kharagpur where hundreds were swarming to listen to him and especially to his tales, after Christmas. He was fast ripening into a Guruship of his own. He had developed several powers when under Sai's influence, and they were further developing as time went on. He became a Sadguru to a large number of people from 1915 onwards. But that Gurudom was not a succession to Sai Baba. The lines of thought, the lines of dealing and the nature of the two personalities, were markedly different²³ as Upasani had cut himself away before the full period of time necessary for him to become Sai like. This is what one is compelled to infer from the facts known to us.

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- ²² especially in such vital mailers as living with women and storing property. Sai Baba avoided both- U. Maharaj stuck to both.

²³ *for instance, the thorough blotting of his reputation by the campaign of Divekar Sastri through Kirloskar magazine would have been impossible if Sai Baba's *anasakti* or avoidance of having any store of wealth or women as his had been persistently carried out by Sri Upasani after he left Sai. It was his accumulation of wealth and women that were the chief grounds of numbers hating or despising him, and it is these that resulted in the total loss of popularity or esteem after 1935. It is his persistency getting girls in 1932 by marrying them to an image held in his hand that was the immediate provocation for the passing of Bombay Devadasi Act 1935 forbidding such marriages.

But we need not dogmatise, it is enough to note that Sai did not state to the public when they asked him, what they were to do after his demise, that Upasani Baba would be his successor. On the other hand, he said to Damia (Damodar Rasane) and Mrs. R. A. Tarkhad, 'Think of me, and I am there'. He said, 'Mother, I am not going away. In any place where you think of me, I am there'. ("I shall be active even from the tomb"). That is how Baba arranged for the continued protection of his devotees, not by leaving a successor but by continuing his personality and allowing himself to contact devotees on occasions of their prayer and even otherwise. Whether people think of him or not, he, as the all-pervading soul, is and would be ever watching and guiding his bhaktas especially. Sai Baba identified himself with Allah quite correctly, because he was merged in Allah and had no interests of his own. That is the only way in which we can contact Allah, that is, through a person merged in Allah. He can act also as Khandoba, Lakshminarayan, Vittoba, etc., which are all individual facets of Allah (*Angani-anya devatah Tait. U*). As Baba himself told the Rohilla, Pandharpur Vittobha and the other Hindu Gods are all Allah (BCS 60).

In this matter, Sri M.B. Rege gives us the correct clue as to how to treat Baba. When Baba was in the body, his connection with the body gave a colouring to our notions of his personality. His personality was connected with the particular Baba body and gave the people the idea that he was a Muhammadan personality they were dealing with, with such and such peculiarities and such and such merits, etc. But when once he left the body, he was no longer to be identified with that body. He had receded into the unknown, the unseen, the beyond; and thereafter had no peculiarities, no particularities, no particular merits or demerits. He was merely God. So, Mr. M.B. Rege says, 'Now, I think of him only as God'. This view of Mr. M.B. Rege is widely prevalent amongst the bhaktas that contacted or do contact Baba. In the case of those who contact Baba subsequent to his Mahasamadhi, it is only as God that they come to him. They are in distress, and they want relief. They cry unto him, and they get relief. That is, He is the divine that protects them. Therefore, it is easy for persons contacting Baba after his Mahasamadhi to deal with him as God. The fame of his deeds,

conveyed through innumerable experiences, during his life in the flesh, tends to confirm this idea, for, even during his fleshy life, Baba had said, 'I am Allah; I am Khandoba, Lakshminarayan, Vittoba, Maruti,' etc., and had shown himself in those forms.

So far as powers are concerned, Baba's powers are seen to be as divine as that of any other forms of God. As for his divine mercy, kindness and love, they are so widespread, so just, and so great as to fully justify the application of the term 'Divine' to him. Every experience of every devotee that comes to him now makes him feel that he is dealing with Divinity, a good Guardian Angel, or Ishta Devata, if he likes to term him so. So Baba's assurance of the continuance of his protecting personality after Mahasamadhi (BCS 47-52) is a sufficient reason why Baba did not mind the absence of any person to get into his Gadi at Shirdi and continue his Guruparampara there. It is not necessary to discuss the claims of X, Y or Z, who occasionally put forward the claim that he is the successor of Sai Baba. A few of such claims seem to have been put forward. But they were all pooh-poohed and there is no set of Sai Bhaktas that we are aware of who are deliberately saying and holding to the position that X, Y or Z was the successor to Baba's Gadi. That, however, is a different matter from the question whether there is now any living person who has to be identified with Sai Baba. Just as the Avatars left Nava Nathas as their representatives on earth, sometimes people come forward and say 'I am an *Avatar* of Sai Baba'. This sort of claim has been put forward in various places at various times. It is not necessary to narrate all of them even if that were possible. But it might be stated that to the knowledge of this author himself three or four came forward with such claims. For instance a young man at Karur professed to be Sai Baba, and was attracting to himself worship and money. But this was soon put a stop to and the author discovered, after personally meeting the Karur boy, the absolute hollowness of his claim. Some others also put forward similar claims. A girl at Bangalore put forward such a claim, and the author, on seeing her, discovered the worthlessness of the claim. It is not necessary to mention other cases. But these have occasionally been mentioned in the columns of the 'Sai Sudha' or other papers and invariably

on investigation, it has been noted that any person, claiming to be Sai Baba, does not show even a very small fraction of Baba's nature. Mere power to read thought, mere clairvoyance, mere production of articles from empty box or bands and mere devotion to Sai or God, will not constitute one into an Avatar of Sai.

So, we might conclude this chapter by saying that Sai left no successor to his seat, that there was no seat to succeed to (as God's seat can never be vacant) and that there is no person living who can be recognised by all as having the entire Sai spirit or Soul in his body, that is, who can be regarded as the Avatar of Sai. That question arises because of the statements of Sai Baba to several of his devotees. When Sri M.B. Rege, Master Tarkhad, and others were requesting Sai to protect them in future lives, Sai said that he was going to be reborn birth after birth. For instance, for the three more births necessary for Master to achieve liberation, he would be reborn and be with him. He made a similar promise to M. B. Rege and also to others. Kaka Dixit (H.S. Dixit) seems to have said, 'Baba said that he would appear suddenly as a boy of eight and show himself, that is, his powers and nature'. We have not till now discovered any boy of eight, who had Baba's wonderful nature and powers. Even if he should take birth somewhere, his *Apantaratma Rupa* is still there and is still helping. Therefore the question of our finding any person now who is the Avatar of Baba need not be further discussed. It is sufficient to say that those who are anxious to benefit by Sai Baba will be very wise if they confine themselves to the well-known history of Sai Baba; and if they adopt the usual and well-known methods for contacting Sai Baba of Shirdi, who is now no other than God himself, they would succeed, and they need not be panting to discover whether there is any Avatar of Sai Baba or any one who is entitled to call himself the successor to Sai Baba for the Shirdi Gadi. *God's seat we repeat is never vacant.* Sai Baba was and is God always being immersed in the God idea, and carrying out God's lilas when he was in the flesh. His Ritambhara Prajna or Antarjnana, as it was called, his control over men's minds and material objects at any distance, his power to appear and do anything anywhere, can only be called divine. These powers we read of in his lilas before 1918, and we read of the same also after 1918. Sri Sai Baba's

kindness in stirring up people's minds to contact him now seem to extend itself in various places in remarkable forms and ways which are not always understood by us, but which are to spread faith in Baba. What Sri Baba did at Coimbatore in 1943, at Ramachandrapuram in 1950-54, at Ahmedabad in 1953, and at Thotapalli Hills in 1954 and in so many other places, have been brought to public notice and have greatly increased the numbers of Sai bhaktas. These recent lilas (about which further details will be given in a later chapter) have strengthened people's faith in Baba and are bound soon to make Sai faith reach all the distant corners of this country, a faith that deals with Sai Baba as God and not as a human being holding a position that has to be filled up by a successor.

(End of Part II)