

BABA'S CONTACT WITH MUSLIMS

A reader who has read so far the life of Baba might be curious to learn whether Muslims got into contact with Baba and if so who were they, what they thought of him, what benefits they obtained and what other Muslims can now obtain from Baba. This is fairly practical and important. Baba drew no distinction between Hindu and Muslim and from the very beginning wished to bring together to himself so as to overcome their mutual differences and dislikes and enable them to work together, individually and nationally. This question is rather closely connected with Baba's being a Hindu or a Muslim, and that question cropped up very frequently when people came to meet Baba for the first time. With the information at our disposal, we can see according to Baba's own statement, that he had a Hindu birth, corroborated by his pierced ears. No Muslim male child get its ears bored. And from Baba's own mouth, we have the further information that his parents gave him away when he was a very tender child to the fakir who brought him up. So, the contact with Muslim starts from Baba when he was a tender babe. The question as to who the *fakir* was cannot be solved now. But what he was, may be inferred. He was the resident of a place fairly near Patri. So far as qualities are concerned, it is fairly good inference, from Baba's frequent reference to the word *fakir* on important and to his giving him valuable directions and guidances that the person who took him away was a real *fakir*, and a great soul. He must have been highly pious, dispassionate and full of *vairagya*. These qualities must have been imbibed by the tender child Baba even in his early years. Baba must have learnt to look upon that *fakir* as his *Guru-God*. Baba used the word fakir in the following cases, namely to denote God or Guru-God. who was constantly watching him and guiding him. The fakir who took charge of him must

have been in all probability a Sufi. Sufis attain the state of trance, and in that condition adopt the Mahavakya *Aham Brahmasmi* in its Arabic form is *Anal Haq* to express their condition. *Anal Haq* was occasionally uttered by Baba. Some devotees say that Baba never uttered it, but that does not prove anything more than that those devotees and their friends had not heard it from Baba. But, if one devotee positively says that he heard *Anal Haq*, that is more valuable than 10 devotees negatively saying that they did not hear. *Anal Haq* is the Arabic form of words which may people have heard Baba utter. Baba has said in general terms that he is *Allah* or God. In particular, he has referred to himself being the various facets of God, that is, Laxmi Narayan, Ganapati and Maruti. Baba has himself said that all these – Maruti, Ganapati, Vittal, Ram are *Allah*. So Baba's saying *Anal Haq* is not improbable. It is only his occasional use of Arabic terms to convey what he often said in Hindustani or Urdu *Maim Allahum*. Baba was not constantly using Arabic or Persian in later days. But at the commencement he was known to be singing songs in strange languages (as Arabic and Persian would have seemed to his listeners at the Shirdi Takia) and also dancing with tinklets tied round his anklets and kanjira in his hand. Apart from question of language, the ideas in which Baba was thoroughly soaked in upto the last were in no way distinguishable from Sufism. Sufism stressed the following important points, namely our ego is a misleading and a disadvantageous entity and our true progress lies in merging the ego in the personality of the Supreme and coming to feel with the certainty of conviction that all action apparently done by us is really done by God, that is, the feeling that God is the sole actor, and the *Guru* is the only *Sadhana* needed. The *Guru* works not by preaching, teaching, and other similar methods, but purely by the force of love and mystic power. Through his soul-force, the *Guru* grips the sishya's soul, absorbs him into himself, shapes him, moulds him, and vests him with all knowledge and power and makes him like himself. *Apana Sarika karitit Tatkai*. These features once noticed in Baba's account of his own dealings with his own *Guru*, and with people like Upasani Baba, whom he wanted to mould perfectly. All things considered, one may very well take it that the *fakir* that Baba referred to, was the *fakir* who took charge of him in his earliest years and who developed him into the pure child that came immediately under the care of Gopal Rao Desmukh alias Venkusa. Here we see Baba's destiny. From Hindu parentage he passed to Muslim hands and from Muslim care again to a Hindu saint's care. The fusion of Hindu and Muslim had to be perfected first in his own person before he could effect any fusion of the Hindu-Muslim elements in society. We may well note how the conflicts are resolved when the two trends are mixed up in himself. The

predominant note in Islam is unity of God and the predominant feature of Hinduism is multiplicity of Gods. As we go into any Hindu home directly, we see a number of images representing a number of deities, namely, Rama, Krishna, Tirupati Venkatesa, Maruti, Datta, Lakshmi, Subbaraya, Ganapati, and so on. The Hindu's revel in all the mythology connected with all these forms and the *puja* is a full of reference to all the peculiarities and the mythological stories about all these, whereas to a Muslim mind, all such mythology, all such differentiation, is a anathema. He must think of only one God and the most fundamental and first dictum of Islam is 'There is no God but God and Muhammed is his prophet'. That is, there is only one God and there is no use of thinking other entities as God. On the contrary, in Hinduism the tendency is to look upon one entity after another as God. Max Muller coined the word Henotheism to denote this tendency, that is, everything is God by turns.

Namaste Vayo Twameva Pratyaksham Brahma Asi

this means, I bow to Thee, O Vayu, you are the visible God. Similarly, other forms are addressed as *Pratyaksham Brahma*, such as Fire, Sun, Water and apart from these, human personalities are to be worshipped and treated as God. The parents are first to be worshipped as God, *Matru Devo Bhava, Pitru Devo Bhava*. A Muslim cannot understand any of these dicta. Similarly, we may say *Athithi Devo Bhava*. Treat your guests especially, uninvited guests, as God. This is something which non-Hindus cannot understand. But amidst these dicta found in *Taittiriya Upanishad*, there is one which might be accepted by Hindus and Muslims to some extent, that is *Acharya Devo Bhava*. This means, 'Treat your *Guru* as God.' In Sufism, the *Guru* is the only God that the pupil is to have his mind. He must be swallowed up in the contemplation of his *Guru* and in the appreciation of his love, and think of nothing else. And this course is the same as the *Taittiriya* ordinance, *Acharya Devo Bhava*. Now, luckily for Baba, when he passed from his Sufi *fakir's* care to Venkusa's care, this element of *Acharya Devo Bhava*, common to Sufism and Hinduism proved to be his sheet anchor. His course for ten or twelve years under Venkusa is described by him in his own words with great glow of love and appreciation. The *Guru* wanted nothing but his love and in turn he wanted nothing but the *Guru*. So, for years and years he gazed on his *Guru* with love and completely forgot everything else in the world. That is the concentration that the Sufis want and that is the concentration, which yields the highest results in *Prema Marga*, emphasized by Lord Chaitanya and others. So, luckily the change from the *fakir* to Venkusa did not involve any serious change in Baba's method of progress. The

sadhana was the same and the *sadhya*, the result was the same. The result was losing oneself in the Bliss of love. When for ten to twelve years Baba had gone through that course, with his Brahmin *Guru*, the development started already under the *fakir* was only ripening more and more. Hence the fusion of Hindu-Muslim was practically effected in his case by stressing the essence of both. The essence of both Sufism and *Bhakti marga* is development by love to reach the goal, which is perfect Satchitananda or love. hence, in his own case, by providential arrangement, the fusion had become perfect and Baba often referring to God or *Guru* could use with equal felicity the word *Allah* or *fakir* or Hari. Baba has used all these terms and we shall see in his later life, he was having *nama japa* or concentration upon what he called indifferently either Allah smarana or Hari nama smarana. Ordinarily, the *Fakirs* or persons that we come across do not use both terms interchangeably. But in Kabir we have got an excellent instance of such identification or fusion. Kabir, according to Baba was his former *Avatar* and Kabir became the *Guru* or the chief of the *Gurus* of the Sufi sect who placed Kabir's poems in the forefront of their *sadhanas* for spiritual advance. Kabir's songs were sung by Baba especially in his earlier days at the takia and were referred to by him in his later talks 'Hari bole, Hari bole, Bayi' is the first line of a very well-known song of Kabir. There we see that all the highest associations of Godhead are brought into the Name *Hari*. Baba included Kabir amongst his inspiring agencies, and once said, Kabir was my Guru. Baba stated at Shirdi later that he went on with *Hari nama japa* and *Allah Smarana* and that Hari descended from the Vishnu Sahasranama (which he placed upon his chest for overcoming the troubles of his heart) into his heart, and that thereafter he got relief. He said to H. S. Dixit that he went on saying Hari, Hari, and Hari appeared before him. Thereafter he stopped giving medicine and went on giving *udhi* only. All who had his spiritual guidance also learnt to identify Hari with *Allah*.

When Baba left Venkusa and went and settled at Shirdi after some travels he had reached a condition in which this fusion was perfect. He appeared to be a Muslim *Fakir*, but Hindus support him and appreciated him, especially Hindu saints whom he used to meet and converse with, namely Devidas and Janakidas. His highly advanced concentration naturally resulted in several psychic powers and these drew the attention of those coming into contact with him. He was highly appreciated by saints from Poona and Sheagaon. During the course of his life, several apparently Hindu saints like Madhavanath Maharaj, Gajanan of Sheagaon and Datta Maharaj sent their men to be influenced by and taken care of by them. This is very good proof that Baba was not treated as an iconoclastic Muslim whom Hindus should

keep aloof from. When he first entered Shirdi, Mahlsapathy mistook him for such a Muslim. But Baba, when he came along with Chand Bhai Patel's party to Shirdi, considered that Khandoba's temple was a proper residence for him, he having been trained under a great Venkusa *bhakta*, and having no anti Hindu tendencies. He considered that he could readily mix with saints. Mahlsapathy prevented him from entering into the temple, though under a mistaken impression, had a very good result. He was obliged to go and live under a tree and finally at the mosque where he was given the opportunity to carry on this work of fusion from a Mosque itself. The published accounts of Baba's experiences give us hundreds of cases of Hindus who took him to be a Mohammadan, but still found him to be fit to be considered their God, and therefore his being a Muslim in dress or using language of Hinduism or Urdu, or in his reference to *Allah* did not prevent them from worshipping him as their god or *Guru*. At first he tried to prevent their worship on himself but finally agreed to it and developed it, as this was part of the mission he had come to earth to fulfill. Getting Hindus to worship him at the Mosque was a great feat and he achieved it. But this was only half the problem. The counterpart of it was getting Muslims also to recognise him as their Godman. How far he succeeded in this we shall now consider.

Providence enabled him to have facilities for this purpose. Though losing himself in God and attaining *Ritam bhara* Prajna or Pratibha or knowledge of everything near and remote; past, present and future; here, there and everywhere was an undoubted help to his impressing people, whether Hindus or Muslims, to accept him as their God, had its characteristic obstacles. The Hindus were in a large majority and so though externally the mass of Hindus considered him as a Muslim, he was worshipped as a Hindu God or Hindu Guru-God in the Mosque. Now, how were the Muslims to treat such a person? He was an *Avilia*, a person with numerous siddhis and one who had developed himself wholly to the service of God and of humanity. But what was the proper course for Muslims to adopt towards him? Every person, be he Muslim or Hindu, when in distress or want, needs help. This powerful *Avilia* was rendering help, spiritual and also material. He was showering food and wealth upon a large number of persons and at the same time, showing his powers of reading the hearts of people and of controlling human and other beings, and even the forces of Nature. A Muslim also naturally reveres such a person with such powers. So, the Muslims had to decide in what way they should deal with such an *Avilia* in a Mosque. If he was a Muslim he was a very heterodox Muslim. The ordinary Muslim will not tolerate any Hindu God or God's portraits or images or rituals connected with Hindu gods. But Baba encouraged all

these, and allowed Gokulashtami and *Ram Navami* to be celebrated at his Mosque with din and bustle. Along with the *Ram Navami* celebrations the Muslim ceremony of *Sandal* also went on at the mosque. The Muslims took out Sandal and went on applying *Sandal* paste with their palms to various objects. This idea of Sandal procession originated with one Mr. Amir Shakkar Dalal, a Mohammadan Bhakta of Korahla. This procession is held in honour of great Muslim saints. *Sandal*, that is, chandan paste and scrapping are put in the *Thali* and these are carried with incense burning before them in procession to the accompaniment of band and music through the village and then after returning to the Masjid, the contents of the dishes are thrown with hands on the *Nimbar* and walls of the *Masjid*. This work was managed by Mr. Amir Shakkar for the first three years and then afterwards by his wife. So, on one day, the procession of the Flags by the Hindus and that of *Sandal* by the Muslims went on side by side and are still going on without any hitch. This ceremony was held on *Ram Navami* day side by side with the Hindu celebration, and the two standards at the Mosque were gaily decorated and carried in procession throughout the streets of Shirdi, both by Hindus and Muslims. This *Ram Navami* celebration is an excellent illustration of how he was able to get Hindus and Muslims together at his feet. But the orthodox section whether of Hindus or of Muslims have their own insuperable difficulties. The extreme orthodox Hindu would not so much as step into a Mosque or bow to a Muslim or give him dakshina. Baba noticed and overcame this inhibition in numerous people who came to him. When Megha, Upasani Sastri, Mule Sastri and the South African doctor were asked to go to him, each one of them had this serious obstacle, the anti-Muslim sentiment to overcome. The Masjid is the last place to which an orthodox Brahmin would go and in a Mosque, under orthodox Muslim management, the presence of Hindu worshippers is neither expected nor relished. Yet, Baba so managed his mosque that his Hindu devotees were pouring in hundreds and thousands to worship him with all the religious ceremonials that Hinduism knows of. Therefore, Baba called his Mosque "A Brahmin's Mosque" and also named it *Dwarakamayee*. This, while attracting most Hindus, would still repel the orthodox Muslims and yet would not suffice to attract the orthodox Brahmin. But on the whole, the Hindu population in India especially in Mumbai and some other States, are far more advanced in education and far more tolerant in their culture and ideas than is generally believed, and great saints like Ramakrishna Paramahansa have widely scattered amongst the educated people and amongst the uneducated people, liberal notions of religion and God-head. More Hindus would naturally go to a Mohammadan saint who is not found to be an iconoclast and who is exercising his power

beneficially to all devotees than Muslims to a Hindu saint. A few Mohammadans, who had known Swami Vivekananda's work like Rajab Ali Mohamed of Mumbai, appreciated Baba, and so had no prejudices, like the cultured and educated Hindus. But as for the others, their attitude towards Baba could not easily attain to the devotion of the Hindu devotees. In trying to give an account of the contact of Muslims with Baba, before and after his *Mahasamadhi*, this writer has encountered one great difficulty. A good number of Muslims no doubt swarmed to Baba because of the wealth he strewed about and the powers he displayed, but as for spiritual contacts, it was extremely difficult for the writer to find out even one person who had got into spiritual touch with Baba. Besides the statements of Rajab Ali who may be treated as a follower of Swami Vivekananda; and that of Chote Khan, there is no material of interest to get from Baba's Muslim devotees. So, it is worthwhile examining what Chote Khan says and then refer to other Muslims who have given statements to this author, which have been published in Devotees Experiences.

LIFE OF SAI BABA