

CHAPTER I

Baba And School Of Philosophy

In religious matters, ordinary people ask many questions without considering the implications thereof and without having any definite idea themselves as to what the questions mean. For instance, to ask about any person to what school of philosophy he belongs, is rather absurd. School of philosophy is for those who pride themselves upon their mastery of some branch of philosophy and who have got egotism enough to identify themselves with only one set of ideas or one school of philosophy as they will call it, and reject the others as being worthless or untrue. Ordinary men have no philosophy at all. Highly advanced souls like Baba also have no school of philosophy, because all ideas are theirs and all wisdom is theirs, and they are not likely to identify themselves with one line of thought to the exclusion of others. Therefore, the question to what school of philosophy Baba belongs, is strictly unanswerable except by saying that He belongs to no school or to all schools. Yet as the question is natural, some sort of rough answer which will satisfy the ordinary reader is sought to be given. But one must always remember that Baba was a *Ritambara Prajna* or *China Samvit*. All knowledge is in the universal Soul or ultimate Reality identifying itself with the centre of all existence, and that is that Sat Chit Ananda, which has manifested itself in the Universe. There have been many minds in many places and in many ages. All of them and their thoughts and ideas belong to it, but it is not confined to any one of them. Baba at any moment without any preparation would answer any question from his standard of *Parabrmhman* or *Ritambara Prajna* and expound any view. But ordinarily Baba dealt with people only at their own level or in the levels which they can expect soon to reach, and so his answers would disclose material for showing that Baba approved some times of one school of philosophy and sometimes another. Really, however, he approved of truth and reality and, if any school of philosophy can claim to be coeval with or corresponding to truth and reality, that school is Baba's.

Baba knew full well that persons coming to him were hardly in a position to reach the heights of advaitic realisation which Sankara aimed at, and, therefore, he was reluctant to give out a complete outline of the system of philosophic thoughts known as advaitism and woven in Sankara's works for instance. But he was great enough to see that advaitic philosophy has its very legitimate place in any complete idea of the Universe and of ourselves. In point of fact, Jnaneswari, the well-known Maratti poetical commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, is based upon Sankara's commentary on the Gita, which of course, is mainly on advaitic line, Baba had great reverence for Jnaneswar and Jnaneswari, and referred people like N.G. Chandorkar and others, who professed to admire and follow Jnaneswar, to pick out for themselves from Jnaneswari, especially on matters of Jnana. Therefore, it is not necessary nor is it possible to go fully into the question of the exact advaitic view of life to which Baba subscribed and addressed to his devotees.

Baba seldom delivered any lengthy address to his disciples, especially after the masses began to come to him in 1908 or 1909. Some of his rare discourses are recorded in Das Ganu's chapters, and some of these chapters give out philosophical sketches which look like advaitism, but there is a sufficient admixture of other schools of philosophy in every one of Baba's utterances, and, therefore, it is safe for us to remember that we should not identify Baba with any particular school of philosophy. We must remember always the principle enunciated in interpreting case law that any general position advanced must be considered as based upon and relating to the facts of the case. In Baba's case, the advaitic remarks that he offered to Chandorkar should not be taken as an absolute statement which should be addressed to all. On the other hand he did not address it to all. In point of fact, the vast majority of persons that came to Baba were hardly fit to understand high philosophy. They were generally mediocre persons with mediocre intellect and obliged to come to Baba on account of their difficulties or on account of their attachment, without having any special pretensions to a capacity to understand subtle systems of philosophy. In several cases, Baba, however, did valuable piece of service for the ultimate

development and growth of the spirit of capable devotees by giving them hints to work on, and the Hints sometimes bordered on advaitic philosophy. We shall in subsequent paragraphs point out what hints he gave and how.

1. (Baba's Charters & Sayings, Nos. 120 and 121). Who am I? Who are We?

120. Baba often said, "Who are we? Night and day think on this".

2. About 1915 R.A. Tarkhad, Managing Director of a mill, got into a compartment at Manmad in the dark and was fighting for a seat with a police constable who was there. When R.A.T. arrived in Shirdi, Baba asked him:-

With whom were you persisting in contest this morning? Bhav (brother), we should not engage in contest with such people! "Who are We?" This we must enquire into.

R.A.T, saw first Baba's reference to the social inequality of the disputing parties, and later on, the Vedantic meaning of the words, i.e., the unity of those parties in Brahman.

3. Baba (to Bala Bhav, i.e., Sitaram Dev): We have only to see (i.e., know) our self.

4. 121. In October 1917, Baba spoke to a Bombay lady:-Mother, what do you want? Ask for it. Lady : Let me be free from the whirl of births and deaths.

Baba: (laughing) : Is this all you want? What! Have you come to die?

Lady : (Shocked), Baba, I do not at all understand you.

Baba : Think who you are.

Lady : I do not understand.

Baba : (pointing to her husband): He will tell you.

Then the lady went with her husband to her lodgings and asked him what Baba meant.

Husband : Baba's words are mysterious. I cannot be sure I have made out his meaning. Probably he means something like this. The Jiva goes on reincarnating any number of times till it gets Sakshatkar i.e. sees or realises God. Baba is God. But people seeing him do not get full faith and do not see him, i.e., feel him to be God; and hence they do not get Mukti.

One must learn from the sastras that essentially Jiva and Siva are one. You think yourself to be a Jiva, is it not?

Lady : Yes

Husband : Baba and the Sastras want you to regard yourself as Siva or God.

Lady : No. No. I am a petty sinner—a Jiva, and not the great God Siva.

Husband : No doubt that is your feeling. But Baba means that by constantly regarding yourself as God, your deeply ingrained belief that you are only a finite Jiva will be removed. This process continued, may be through numerous births, and strengthened and helped by contact with Saints, will give you the firm belief that you are Brahman. That must be Baba's meaning,

(The pair again returned to Dwaraka Mai).

Baba: Mother, I have listened (from here) to all that your husband told you. Keep that in mind.

Baba sometimes in the course of his talk on other matters introduced the question, 'Who am I?' 'Who am I' is the test question for Atma Vichara. Yoga Vasishta says:

Ramasva atma vicharoyam koham soyam itirupah

Avidya jatasamsara dahane dahanasmritah

Vasishta says to Rama, "O! Rama, this is Atma Vichara. It takes the form of 'Who am I', and it burns up the gross of ignorance and samsara".

Now, Baba naturally talked about the inner nature of various problems, for instance, property. In the sadhak's progress, he has to analyse I and all its derivatives like 'mine' etc. Now, 'mine' means property. To help Sadhakas Baba had several times to explode their notions of property. Property and egotism are both warping the real vision, which would enable a person to understand what he really is, that is, what the self is. Self is distinguished from I in this way. I is the egotistic aspect of the self. Too much of identification with the body, and its particularities is involved in the I. The real self is more inward, and is the true basis of the I. That self is regarded as the one thing that underlies all selves, that is, the Universal Self. It is the same as the Paramatma, the Parabrahman. It is God. So, on one occasion, when Baba wanted to show people how ridiculous

fighting about property was, he said that at Puntamba, which he once visited, he discovered two parties were fighting with each other bitterly, and he wanted to know what the bone of contention was. He found out a pot full of coins was there, and that was what they were fighting for. While they were fighting, he quietly moved on to the pot, and removed the pot away. Then he put the questions, 'Who am I? and 'Whose is the pot?' He said, 'I am the pot and the pot is mine', thus showing that notions of property were highly artificial and baseless. As Goldsmith put it, 'The world is mine', one can treat everything on earth as one's property and rejoice over it so long as there is no other person to run counter to one's thought or activity. Therefore, Baba wanted to disabuse people of their notions of property, and took occasion to correct the ordinary people's notions of property.

Once Kondaji's (a Marwadi) stack of hay took fire. Baba tried to prevent it by sending him to go and look at it. But he returned without seeing it properly, and then said there was no fire. Then Baba pointed out to the smoke issuing from the stack. He then ran up and found that the whole thing had been reduced to ashes. People in the neighbourhood, with neighbouring stacks, were all afraid that the brisk breeze that was blowing would set their stacks also on fire. Baba then came up, and going round Kondaji's stack, drew a line of water round it, and said, 'Only this stack will be burnt'. Kondaji, however, was very sorry that he had lost his property. Then Baba said, 'How stupid is this? The marwadi talks of himself as his body, that is the form made up of flesh, bones etc. Hay is something totally different. What has he to do with the stack or the stack to do with him? Hallo. Marwadi you better make up for this loss in some other transaction'. Thus. Baba gave him some practical advice to get over his grief, and at the same time pointed out that philosophically speaking, there was no basis for the notion of either 'I' or 'Mine'. It is ruinous for any soul that desires its true welfare to go on dwelling over and over again upon I and 'Mine'. When he thinks of the I it does not get to the real inwardness of the I. On the other hand, it centres its emphasis on everything unimportant. For instance, if you ask a boy whom you meet, 'Who are you?' you may get ten different answers, such as, 'I

am a boy, I am named Rama, I am the son of Krishna, I am a Hindu, I am aged 16, I am a boy attending St. Peter's School', etc. That is, every one of these things is not he, but it is an accident attached to him which he mentions as he. What is the central core round which all these accidents gather? That he does not know. Philosophers might say, There is a piece of Chaitanya or Pure Consciousness which, however, changes its purity and gets attached to some external body, and then a particularity comes into it, namely, a red haired youth. So, the I becomes a red haired youth. Thus we develop various notions of I, which strictly speaking are not true, and which do not help us in the ultimate goal that we have to reach, however useful some of them may be for our progress in our material circumstances. Therefore, Baba tried to rebuke this egotism especially when it showed itself in offensive forms. *Abhimana* means overfondness of dwelling on this particularity you call I connected with the body, and it also comes in relation to property, Therefore, the most important thing to be attained in the case of a sadhaka is to lessen and remove this *abhimana* to dissociate himself from the body idea. I and 'mine' represent the body idea. Baba has rendered great service in exposing this idea, (as we will show in a separate chapter).

The term, School of philosophy, has a meaning only to theoretical and intellectual labourers like college professors and students. Abstract philosophies do not spring up in life, where (1) complex problems involving theory, etc., rise and (2) practical methods are evolved for progress and satisfaction not necessitating an enunciation of problem or solution. Once a spiritual advance is made and a certain position reached, differences in theory between schools of philosophy are not seen at all and their solution becomes unnecessary. For saints and sages like Sai Baba, there is no unsolved problems of philosophy. Again schools of philosophy rise only amongst theorists and intellectuals, who see things in their separateness and dogmatise. Dogmas lead to bitter controversies. To the person who has reached a high level, life is a whole. His whole life and life all round at all levels, become intelligible, orderly, controllable and single. Such siddhas get on with life and have no troubles. Contradictions

and the irreconcilable are no contradictions or irreconcilable at all to the siddhas. A man standing at one end of a long alley sees the two sides of the alley meeting at a point. But to the place owner who runs through or flies above them, there is no point of juncture, and all the way is open and unobstructed. Words and our brains are poor instruments to grasp or express the entire truth of Reality. It is a firm principle with siddhas not to waste their time to discuss the problems of the ignorant or to take sides along with them on such questions.

Sai Baba used to find Chandorkar, Khaparde and others, very often discussing amongst themselves, what interpretation they should put upon Baba's words in the light of one theory or another. Baba invariably dissuaded them from doing so, for as they gradually progressed they would themselves understand what was necessary, and that was quite enough.

The real truth when reached in actual life is so different from the guesses one makes especially after enormous discussion and argument about what the truth is. Persons having various doubts as to the state of realization of God or the soul, come into the presence of one who has realized thinking they would ask the latter questions to clear the doubts. But they simply sit and find questions unnecessary. Persons in a state of calm with ability to face the truth, and allow their minds and hearts to soak in it, find their doubts and problems all dissolved. This has happened frequently at Ramanasram. Similarly people sat before Sai who could grip every one's mind and put it into the correct attitude. Occasionally God-realizers like Ramana Maharishi and Sai Baba may drop a hint or two and clear a difficulty. The difficulty to understand or reconcile is found mostly not in the theoretical portion of the philosophy but in the Sadhaka's ability to realise its truth. We see at each higher step more and more of the truth and less and less of difficulty, i.e., the difficulties that daunted us when we had not conquered our self, and when passions and egotism clouded our view. To Saints like Sai who are Samartha Sadgurus, the sishya's entire mind, its state and difficulties are all quite plain, and the Siddha can easily take it along to appreciate and attain the final goal of life without allowing any problem or hindrance to arise.

Sri Sai Baba himself pointed this out in connection with his friends and fellow-workers. In Baba's Charters & Sayings, 175, Baba mentioned that intellectual differences frequently obstruct one's progress in spiritual and philosophical matters, and that the solution for them was not from an intellectual point of view, but from a new path, i.e., a path of faith given and adopted. Prof Kant discussing the question of reality, intelligibility and quality of the soul, world, and God, said that this could not be solved by pure reason, but by practical expediency, i.e., by adopting some rule that in practice works and yields satisfactory results. In the above mentioned B.C. & S. 175, Baba states that himself and three others were studying *puranas* and other works and discussing among themselves (obviously on an intellectual basis) how to get realization, and they had their own differences. One stressed the necessity of depending upon oneself, as the Gita says, *udhdharet atmana*. Another, equally self-sufficient, said that the main thing was to make the mind self-centred, free from thoughts and doubts, because it was we who were in everything and everywhere. A third companion said that *Vichara* was the thing to be stressed, and *Vichara* consisted in the *Viveka* regarding the difference between '*Nitya*' and '*Anitya*', the Changeable and the Unchangeable, the Changeable form and the formless Unchangeable Reality. Obviously with all this controversies they were not anywhere near God-realisation. Baba disliked all these metaphysical and intellectual discussion and stressed the practical steps that had to be taken i.e., to approach a Guru, and surrender one's *Tan, Man, Dan* to the Guru and leave it to the Guru to accomplish the rest. The field of this intellectual discussion was a veritable forest, vast and dense, through which no way out could be found. So, as they rambled on without finding their way out, until they came across one who thoroughly knew the forest (a *vanajari*), a forest dweller. The Vanajari, asked them, 'Where are you going into these trackless wood unnecessarily?' He kindly invited them to go with him and take food, which should enable them to continue their journey through the forest. The majority being selfsufficient and independent, the Vanajari's words were not heeded. But the party went into this intellectual wood and lost their way. Again the Vanajari appeared before them,

and showed them how by relying on their own intelligence they had lost their way and gone on the wrong path, and told them that a guiding finger was necessary to show them the proper way. The Vanajari said offer of food was not to be despised, for offer of food was an auspicious sign betokening the coming success in the enterprise. So, he repeated the offer of his hospitality. For a second time the majority decided to reject the offer.

So they continued their rambling in the trackless forest. Hunger seized them all but the unbending three were too proud to change. Baba alone left that company, went to the Vanajari and accepted food and water. That Vanajari was the Guru and enquired of all that they had talked about, and the conclusions they had come to. Baba revealed to him the entire facts. The others did not care to depend on a Guru or a Guide. Baba for himself, he felt that the Guru, and Guru alone, was the thing needed. So saying Baba bowed in reverence to the Guru with faith. The Guru at once put his faith to the test. Baba's description of the test resembled an allegory, and was obviously symbolical, Baba says—

"Then he took me to a well, tied up my legs with a rope, and suspended me, head downwards, from a tree by a side of the well. My head was about three feet off the water, which I could not reach. And my Guru left me there and went away, God knows where. He returned after 4 or 5 hours and asked me how I fared. "In great bliss was my time passed", I answered. The Guru, mightily pleased with me, drew me near him, passed his palm over my head and body and spoke to me tender words dripping with love, and he put me into his school where I entirely forgot my father and mother and all attachments and desires.

"I loved to gaze at him. If he were not there to see, I would not like to have eyes at all. I did not wish to go back. I forgot all other things but the Guru. My life was concentrated in my sight and my sight in him. That was the object of my meditation. In silence I bowed.

"Meanwhile Realisation flashed upon me of itself without effort or study, purely by his grace.

"Guru's grace is our only sadhana. Jnana comes as experience (or in its wake)".

We are now in a position to answer the questions which are sometimes asked about Baba. What school of philosophy did he belong to? Did he uphold the advaitic view that there is only one absolute truth and that everything that we see in the Universe is but the result of Maya, or was he a realist holding that the Seen Universe is the Truth, the Reality? Was he an upholder of Nirguna worship, that is, the worship of the Unseen, the Absolute without attributes, or was he a worshipper of various forms of God? Was he advocating the margas of bhakti or yoga or of karma? But to give a full answer to each of these questions may require many chapters. We shall take the first question regarding Baba's school of philosophy, whether it was pure Suddha Advaita, the Advaitic standpoint of Sankara found in his innumerable works, such as, Vivekachudamani, etc. The one short answer to all questions about Baba is that Baba's complete views and complete nature are totally unknown to any one. No one was with him all through his life, nothing, as Boswell did in the case of Johnson, everything he did or said, or omitted to say or do. But we have fairly large mass of his sayings and doings when he was in the fleshy body, that is, up to 1918. As to his lilas and utterances and deeds, after 1918, we have an equally large, if not larger mass. From these one may attempt to give some answers. But in the first place, it is better to preface our observations with this remark that Baba was everything to everyone. He suited himself to the capacity or circumstances of each.

Ye yatha mam prabadyante tans tataiva bhajamyahatn.

This means, 'In whatever way one surrenders himself to Me, I suit myself to him in that line'. This is the remark of Lord Krishna, that is God.

Mere babaku marma na janare koimere

Sree babaku siddhaavasta

Jisku jaisa janare

This means "None knows the real inwardness of my Baba: Some said he was a Yogi, some a sensualist, some called him a wise man, some a hypocrite, some called him Brahman or God. Baba's state is the Siddha Avasta. Each finds in him what he thinks him to be".

Sri Sai Baba who identified himself with God had the same observation to make. He was treated as the Ishta Devata by many devotees as Rama, Datta, Vittobha, Khandoba, Ganapati and Maruti, and was approached as a great Saint by Hindu philosophers and saints, and as an avalia by Muslims, and as a weird person by the ignorant outsiders. To each he gave the response suitable to him or her. Where a person was absolutely against realistic or dualistic ideas, Baba did not force on him such ideas. Where persons, for instance, held the view that a Guru was unnecessary and did not care to go near him closer and closer, he simply dismissed them with the remark, 'A Guru (to you) is unnecessary. In the case of pure advaitic sets, his role was that of a sympathetic adviser. Many persons holding advaitic views are in practice realistic and advaitic. This applies to millions, especially in Maharashtra as also in the South. Baba found that persons like Upasani Baba belonging to the Uddhava Mutt adhered theoretically to the school of Sankara while following in practice much the same method as Sri Ramanujacharya's followers or Madhvacharya's followers. The worship that they adopted was realistic and dwaitic and they had to build upon it and hoped all the time that at some time, the advaitic goal will be reached. Baba dealt with them, in accordance with their own views.

So, when Upasani Baba approached, Baba guided him, in practice, on lines suitable to his fitness. He had to develop more and more of bhakti to his Ishta Devata for he already held the ideal of advaitic unification, realisation as a distant goal. So, he led him on to bhakti first. Bhakti in his case, as in the case of most others, was bhakti to his Gurudeva treated as identical with his Ishta Devata in accordance with the closing stanza of Swetaswatara Upanishad. He had to develop staunch bhakti and implicit reliance on Sai Baba before he could get any benefit as a sishya. So, Baba revealed to the sishya much of his powers and nature, and enabled him first to admire, and then to love him. He undertook everything on behalf of his Ankita i.e., sealed the sishya marked as his own, undertook all temporal and spiritual obligations on his behalf. Thus he succeeded in preparing the soil for sowing the seeds of spiritual growth. He implanted and increased in him the necessary virtues of Brahmacharya, Satya, and Vairagya,

and thereby prepared him for the position of a Samarta Sadguru. While doing all this, he did not omit to point out in a general way, the ultimate goal. Upasani Baba could not understand how everything could be one, himself, all beings and his God; nor could he tolerate loss of personal identity to merge in the Impersonal Absolute as the goal of man. But that was the school or Mutt to which Upasani Baba by birth belonged. Sai Baba taught him through hints the wonderful truth that all that exists is but a manifestation of the one reality which transcends them. This realisation, according to the Sankara doctrine, is to be reached mainly through *vichara* supported by *vairagya*, *samadhi shatka*, (equanimity, and five other virtues) and *mumukshutva*, i.e., desire for liberation from samsara. So Baba started him on vichara marga also in a rather peculiar way. But first for Vairagya, i.e., for overcoming the desire for wealth and women (Kamini-kanchana) and other lower urges, Baba gave him instruction through visions. He first showed him that there was a Papa purusha or lower element in him and that had to be burnt out. So Baba in a vision enacted the scene of his catching hold of a person standing behind Upasani exactly resembling him but wearing dirty clothes, who was interfering with Upasani's receiving instruction from the Guru. Baba caught hold of him and burnt him up. Upasani was crying out all the while. 'It is me, Baba, you are burning; it is me, Baba, you are burning'. Baba Said, 'No doubt, it is you, but you in the papa purusha form, that is your sinful nature. Unless that is burnt up, how is the grand work which is to be accomplished by our joint endeavours to be achieved?' Baba said that he had burnt out the papa purusha.

To overcome Upasani's attachment to wealth, Sai Baba showed him in a vision that there was some figure exactly like Upasani, seated on a grand pile of wealth, and asked Upasani to see him, and said 'That is you, that is your punya purusha., After seeing that second figure, Upasani asked, 'If the figure you burnt the other day is my papa purusha, and this is my punya purusha, who am I?' This is the vichara or enquiry into the Self, which every true teacher must encourage the sishya to make. Baba used to say occasionally, 'Enquire who we are, where we are, and what we are, etc., and he enbaled Upasani to note that in himself

there was a *papa purusha* and also a *punya purusha*. Therefore, when the question was raised by Upasani himself 'What his Self was', Baba gave the correct hint. That is how he sowed the seed of *vichara*, which was to bear good fruit very much later. Baba gave the explanation, "You are neither the one nor the other, but beyond both; you are neither your *punya* nor your *papa purusha* but beyond both. That which constitutes Me constitutes you, And there he left it. He was simply talking above the head of the sishya who had no ideas on this subject. But long afterwards, when Upasani started Parayana of Avadhuta Gita, wherein these ideas are fully expanded and explained, the seed sown at Shirdi bore rich fruit.

According to true advaita of Sankara, the Jiva talked of as I by Kasinath Upasani was *in essence* the same as Parabrahman, the one underlying Reality which ought to be seen in all manifest things, and which people call Brahman or God. What is it you call God or Brahman? 'That from which everything came and into which everything is going to have laya or merger, is Brahman" and "That Brahman is Yourself. That Brahman has manifested itself as the Universe, and has manifested itself as the Jiva. The Jiva like so many other forces is but a manifestation, the underlying reality being the same in all cases. Descartes, when he said that the whole world was his idea ('I am the thinker of the whole world') did not note this truth, namely, that he, when he talked of himself as a thinking force, was but a manifestation, like the rest of the world, of the one ultimate reality. So, the world is a manifestation, the ego is a manifestation, and that which manifests, namely the Real is "Brahman", and that is what Baba meant when he said 'That which constitutes *me*, (i.e. Brahman) constitutes *you* , This pithy teaching was just delivered, and then the vision closed. It was only remembered by Upasani Baba for very many years that is, till 1936 or so, as something remote from life. It was only about 1936 that the teaching commanded respect and acceptance. Upasani Baba then understood how the Jiva also merges in the Purna Parabrahman, and how real moksha or liberation consists in the Jiva losing its separate identity and imaginary independence and sinking itself into the one absolute, undifferentiated Real.