

CHAPTER II

Sri Sai Baba & Propaganda (Or Prachar)

The term propaganda has been seriously strained; it obtained a very bad odour during war days. War propaganda meant downright falsehood to serve one's own purposes. Therefore, the term 'propaganda' is disliked very much, and when it is used in connection with prachar for Sai Baba, some people are shocked. However, we might repel the tide of misuse and bad odour in respect of that term and resume the proper use of the word 'propaganda'. Sai prachar and propaganda are exactly the same, and using them in that sense, we shall consider the question whether Sai prachar is to be objected to. This objection is unintelligible to many people. Why should anybody object to Sai becoming known? Sai prachar means Sai getting known. Why anybody should object to this, passes one's understanding. If Sai is a great soul, if he has done good to hundreds and thousands of people in certain parts of the country, why should not that be known to a larger number of people in a larger number of places? If that is proper, prachar is the means. It is not only proper but desirable, nay, it may even be a duty, at least in the case of those who are fitted to do prachar and to whom prachar has become a *sadhana* by Baba's grace. So we shall just for one short moment note what the implication of prachar is.

The implication of prachar is that someone who is aware of Sai's nature and Sai's doings, and the great benefits derived thereby, goes about communicating to other people who are not aware of them the facts which are within his knowledge. *Prima facie* there should be no objection to this, but on the other hand one should be thankful that there is Sai prachar. But objections have been raised, and first they have been raised by those who are asked to give out their experiences for the purpose of prachar. To many people experiences are of a special and personal nature dealing with delicate matters, and, therefore, their disclosure is not easy. In some cases, Baba has objected to people disclosing their experiences, especially to outsiders who may have no regard for the same. That was in times long gone by, and, at present, the esteem for Sai Baba being so widely prevalent, the chances of one's communicating experiences to

strangers who will scoff at them, are not great. Still if there are people who are merely scoffers, even for propagandists it would be well not to open their mouths and start propaganda in the midst of such company. Sometimes it may happen that scoffers at propaganda might turn to be men who came to scoff but remained to pray.

In this connection, we may note what happened to one Mr. Bala Saheb Bhate. He was a Mamlatdar at Kopergaon with numerous friends, who were Sai Bhaktas. They were living at various places, and whenever they wanted to go to Shirdi to see Sai Baba, they had to go by train to Kopergaon, and at Kopergaon they would see their friend, Bala Saheb Bhate. Bala Saheb Bhate would ask them what they had come for, and when they said they had come to see Sai Baba at Shirdi, he would scoff at them and say, 'You graduates and big people with education, training and civilization, you go and call on an uncultured rustic, a poor, worthless fakir, and is it to this your degree and University position have come?' In that style he would go on, and if they asked him to go and see Sai Baba for himself so that he might correct his opinion of Baba, he would scoff even that proposal, and he thought it *infra dig* of his position to go and see Sai Baba living at Shirdi, though Shirdi was legitimately within his own taluk and jurisdiction. It so chanced on one occasion that when he had gone to visit Rahata, the head village of Shirdi, he happened to visit Shirdi. Then it struck him that he might see Sai Baba. The moment he went and saw Sai Baba, Baba's wonderful power gripped him. He could not get away from Sai Baba for an hour or two. When people reminded him that it was time for him to get away, he said, 'Yes, wait, wait,' and went on looking at Baba for one or two hours. The fascination of Baba was most extraordinary. He had gone with the opinion that Baba was something below his notice (because he was a man of importance, not only a mamlatdar but one highly thought of by the Collector, and one who thought very highly of his own qualities and abilities). With such an opinion up to that time he had gone there. Perhaps an undercurrent was started by Baba within Bhate's mind that he had been reviling, abusing, and considering low a person about whom he knew nothing. He thought that if that person were proved

to be really a wonderful and great Saint with weird powers, then his action was a great sin and would badly react on himself. This undercurrent might have been working in him to change his tone. When he went before Baba, Baba attracted him to himself.

Baba had no difficulty at all in seizing his (Bhate's) mind and filling it with fear and remorse. He had to make a right-about-turn in his own mind, and he suddenly conceived a great regard and esteem for Baba. From that moment onwards, he used to pay frequent visits to Shirdi. Finally he actually made up his mind to quit his appointment and remain with Baba. People reminded him that he had a family to support, and that it was not proper for him to give up his employment. Even Baba asked him not to give up service. But his attachment was so great that he would not care for the consequences and he sent up his resignation. The Collector thought that he might give him a year's leave, though he was not entitled to leave, on the ground that he had been caught up by the fascination of a mad fakir, and, therefore, deserved consideration. But Bhate would not change his mind. Finally, even though he was not entitled to get anything from Government, the Collector enabled him to get a compassionate gratuity on the score that in the course of his duties, he fell under the clutches of a mad fakir, and therefore, was unable to continue his duties any further, as though it was sickness that seized upon him. Thus, a person like Bala Saheb Bhate, who began with violent aversion to Baba, was finally drawn to, and became a very ardent devotee of Baba and derived great benefit thereby till his death.

Thus we see that merely because there are some scoffers, we should not avoid mentioning Sai Baba, and the great work that he is even now doing for people. The effect and value of propaganda will depend on circumstances. Generally, prachar is undoubtedly good. Incidents like the above might be quoted about others also. On principle there is absolutely nothing wrong in publishing and broadcasting Sai's great merits. This was not at first properly understood, and leading gentlemen, the trustees of the Shirdi Sai Sansthan, set their faces deliberately against all prachar, thinking especially that it was wrong on

principle. It was about 1935 that the broadcasting of Baba's good qualities in 'Sunday Times' was started by the 'Southern Swami' who was pulled by Baba to himself through Upasani. When this work was going on in 1940 Baba suddenly thrust large sums of money into the hands of the Southern Swami and the work gained ground. But suddenly just a handful of the influential people amongst the Sai Sansthan set their faces against propaganda and published in a number of language newspapers in Bombay State that the Southern Swami was not to be trusted, and that he was doing propaganda for his own private purposes, and that propaganda was never favoured by Baba. All these have since been found to be incorrect even by the Shirdi Sai Sansthan and in their later publication by Gunaji they have practically withdrawn their aspersions. So far as their aspersions on the Southern Swami go, there is Baba to look after the Swami and his name.

But so far as the Swami's propaganda is concerned, it might be mentioned that Sai Baba has shown that it is he that carries on the propaganda and really not the Swami. This truth was forced upon the Swami in a number of ways. Once when he went to a village near Vellore, a child, only then months old, was shown to him, and it was mentioned that for 8 months the child had fits, and the chances of its survival appeared to be very poor. People wanted the Swami to bless. Swami took up some *udhi* of Baba, and, putting it on the child, said, 'By Baba's Grace this child would never again have fits'. And from that time onwards the child had no more fits. So Baba himself had worked a miracle or *chamatkar*, and that converted the whole of that village into Sai Bhaktas.

A Similar incident occurred at Kakinada. There was a lady with hysteria. It was thought to be a very hopeless case. But this Swami was invited and the Swami, after offering *Karpura Arati* to Baba, gave the *arati* to the lady, and assured her that Baba, being her mother, would keep her from hysterical attacks thereafter. She was practically free from further attacks so long as she was in Kakinada, and even later she had only very few and mild attacks. She had also derived great benefits. This fact spread the name of Sai Baba far and wide in all the places where she was living and thus Baba's propaganda was really carried on by Baba himself. That was the truth which Swami had to mention, but some

people thought that it was a piece of bragging on the part of the Swami that Baba was working through him. But now, more than ever, the Swami has got clear proof that everything which was called his own work was really Sai's own work, including the writing of the articles and other things and the other means employed by him for prachar. As is found in Baba's Sahasranamam, prachar is the work allotted to Das Ganu and Narasimhaswami by Sai Baba himself and is looked after by Sai Baba himself. Thus one important step which at least Sai devotees should not condemn, is Sai prachar by Swami and Das Ganu.

Above all, the recent happenings in Coimbatore, Ramachandrapuram and Totapalli hills, have shown that Baba is carrying on propaganda himself by working miracles in a most unexpected fashion. There are persons who say 'Sai Baba is dead, and, why do puja for him? Why do you preach about dead Gurus and not living Gurus? Why do you talk about Sai Baba at all?' These questions become absurd when people get to know of what is being done in the three places mentioned above. At Coimbatore, Sai suddenly appears as a serpent and stays with people for 17 hours receiving worship, receiving naivedya, and never harming any one, and inspiring every one with confidence and courage that Sai Baba might be approached even though he comes in the form of a serpent. At Ramachandrapuram (Godavari District) he showered messages and inscriptions on such a large and liberal scale that people were simply dumbfounded. When the Joint Registrar of Co-operative Societies goes to Ramachandrapuram and offers a huge rose garland (*Nila Malai*) consisting of hundreds of flowers, on each petal of each flower of the garland, the words 'Om Sai' appear. This is stunning proof that Sai is living, that Sai responds to prayer, and that Sai Baba wishes that all should come to know of his glory and benefit thereby, especially because once they see that Sai is living and answering prayers, and is helpful, vast masses, hundreds, thousands, and lakhs of people will get Sai faith, and that will build up their future. Thus the best answer that we can now give to the objection to Sai prachar is that Sai Baba himself is doing prachar over and over again, especially in places like those mentioned above, Totapalli Shanti Asram being the most recent one.