

Chapter IX

Baba - Human and Divine - Humour

Baba's personality was always puzzling to those who made an effort to understand him fully instead of being content with accepting one part of him as Baba and ignoring the rest. The latter is the wisest course for the majority and is ordinarily adopted by most of his devotees. But the more intellectual and the more curious amongst those approaching Baba make an effort to understand him and try to grasp as much of the facets of his complete personality as is possible. There they meet with apparent contradictions and mutual inconsistencies, and they are baffled. So much so, a Parsi doctor, named Dr. Jal, told this writer not to attempt to understand or write the life of Satpurushas. He said it was simply impossible to understand them. Evidently in his own case, he had tried and failed and was impressed by his own failure as to give the kindly advice to others not to waste their mental efforts in trying to grasp a Satpurusha's personality. In point of fact when we talk of ourselves or others, we go on understanding more and more

of both and with a working knowledge of both get on in the world. Similarly in respect of a Satpurusha's personality, we must try and understand more and more, for it is our nature to desire more and more of such knowledge. When a person is attempting to place before the public a picture of the life and lilas of a great Purusha, it is incumbent on him to present all sides of the Divine Personality. The task is difficult on account of the various apparent inconsistencies that are bundled together in the personality, but all the same we shall attempt it as we have already stated in an earlier portion of the book.

Emerson has stated that the human and divine are not separate, but rather various grades of one continuous series. When qualities arrive at a certain stage and are of a certain sort, people declare, 'This is divine', for they are far above the average human. Whether the superiority is in respect of power or of kindness or other qualities, the words are uttered at once, 'These are divine qualities'. Yet it is a human person that exhibits those qualities. We are not at present concerned with the intricacies of Christian theology, and we are at liberty to take Jesus Christ as a human person and point out the divine qualities in him. Tennyson wrote of him in the opening lines of 'In Memoriam', 'Thou seemest human and divine', and many readers would certainly note the human features of Jesus Christ as beaming out of the gospel, touched not infrequently with the divine features.

Similarly those who came in contact with Sai Baba have come in contact with his human peculiarities and the divine peculiarities mixed up so very closely that the two seem to be inseparable. So, 'Thou seemest human and divine' may be applied to Sai Baba as well as to Jesus Christ. We may note in passing that this combination, far from being an undesirable mixture, is a necessary one. If some being existed with all divine perfections only, human beings would not be able to approach or appreciate him. It is the fact that this Satpurusha has his human body, human touches, and human limitations that make us feel that he is also a human being, and we draw inferences about his inner nature from knowledge of our own nature and that of our fellow beings; we have the confidence that we have understood the nature and qualities of the Satpurusha

to some extent at least, and, we, are, therefore, emboldened in approaching and dealing with such a Satpurusha. Unless there were such human features and limitations, this personality would be of no use to us. That is why, avatars are described in the Hindu scriptures as promoting human welfare. They combine human and divine features. Especially in the case of Sri Rama, the seventh Avatar, the human features come out constantly, and yet are supported by the divine features so as to enable the Rama personality to be of great service to us, spiritual and temporal. Rama dhyana, Rama smarana, and Rama Lila, in general are found very useful for spiritual and temporal purposes alike on account of the human element in Rama. Similarly in Sai Baba, who is often termed Sai Rama, (partly because Ram Navami was chosen by Baba to be the day for his Urus—annual festival—to be celebrated at Shirdi and partly because he showed himself as Rama) his human elements and divine elements are both mixed up so finely as to help to understand him and approach him. Therefore we shall proceed to set out in the following paragraphs some of his human characteristics and show how these combined with the divine elements in him, and how the two, far from being inconsistent, are harmoniously blended in our impression of the Great One. Humour is a distinct human quality. And of all Baba's human qualities, his sense of humour was the most outstanding. Baba's sense of humour was of a very peculiar kind being at first hardly intelligible to people around him. The humour consisted in there being two applications for the words he uttered, one being patent and the other often being discovered after some time and enquiry. We shall give some examples.

In the case of one G.D. Pelaspi, who approached Baba, the latter according to his custom of revealing his *antarjnana* about the visitor so as to infuse faith in him, mentioned the fact that the trouble of Pelaspi was that a debtor of his, named Bapu Saheb, was delaying and evading payment of Rs. 4,000 due from him to Pelaspi. So Baba said when Pelaspi came, 'What is Bapu Saheb doing?' Some one present said, thinking that Baba referred to Bapu Saheb Jog, 'He is sleeping'. Baba said, 'When he comes here, beat him. He owes me Rs. 4,000 and is delaying payment'. People fancied that Baba was

angry with Bapu Saheb Jog for the alleged non-payment of debt to him. But Baba was referring only to the Pandit of Pelaspi. Pelaspi understood Baba's words well enough, and took Baba's words as a good augury that pressure would be brought upon his debtor to make the payment quickly. But the others who misunderstood Baba to refer to the poojari of Baba, namely, Bapu Saheb Jog, informed him of Baba's words, and he was very much upset by Baba's statement, for he did not owe Rs. 4000 to Baba, and he said, 'The claim is unjust'. But Baba was enjoying the fun. Similarly Baba used the words, Tatya, Bapu, Vani', etc., referring to particular persons or particular sorts of persons. People who heard him could not make out the real reference. Baba enjoyed the fun.

On one occasion, when Shama was bitten by a serpent, he was advised to go to the Bairoba temple to which people usually resorted when bitten by cobras. But he said that his temple was Baba's place, and he ran up to Baba. Baba had wonderful powers of curing cobra bite and other poisons. But when Shama came to climb up the steps of the Dwarakamayee, Baba said, 'Do not get up, Brahmin. Get back. Descend *Hat Mage, Hat Mage*'. Shama was shocked. Here was his hope in Baba, and Baba was asking him not to get up but to get down. Baba enjoyed his confusion for a moment and then asked him to get up. Baba said 'Come up. The fakir (God) is kind. You will be cured¹', He then told people to take Shama home and see that he did not go to sleep, but was kept awake for 24 hours till the poison could be completely absorbed in or expelled from the system. The humour in Baba's words was in the fact that the words 'Do not get up, Brahmin' appeared to be addressed to the Brahmin Shama, when 'Brahmin' was used in the vocative case. But that word was used by Baba in the accusative case. The words were addressed not to the Brahmin but to the cobra poison, and the cobra poison was directed by command of Baba not to go up the Brahmin, that is, go up Shama's body. 'Get down, Get down', similarly, were addressed to the poison and not to the Brahmin. So, the poison had to get down his body and get away. This siddhi is referred to in *Srimad Bhagavata*, 15th Skanda, in the verse, *Yata sankalpa Samsiddhih*, and in the Upanishidic phrase,

'*Sathyavak Satyasankalpa*', the attributes of divinity and denote the fact that words or ideas expressed by a person in the divine state, in which Baba was, would have immediate effect and so the poison did no further injury to Shama's body. But while such a potent mantra was being uttered by Baba, which is a divine characteristic, there was also the human characteristic of humour combined with it. This was peculiar to Baba.

We shall mention another occasion when Baba conferred the remarkable power of production or materialisation upon Kusa Bhav, while having some fun at his expense. Kusa Bhav, as already mentioned in a previous chapter, had developed his mantric side with the help of a low species of mantras, which resulted in the production of articles belonging to various persons and their transfer to his hands. Baba, when Kusa Bhav came to his feet, directed him to refrain from such sinful practices and the poor man was regretting that the glorious powers which he had and the fame which he obtained thereby, were all lost. One day when he approached Baba, Baba asked him, 'what did you eat to-day?' Kusa Bhav said, 'Nothing, because it is Ekadasi to-day'. Baba pretended not to know what Ekadasi was, and asked 'What does Ekadasi mean?'

Kusa Bhav said, 'It is a day for Upavasa'.

Baba (again pretending not to know): What is Upavasa?

Kusa bhav (seriously in Hindustani): *Rojas*. Upavasa is like Rojas.

Baba : What is Rojas?

Kusa Bhav : We fast, that is we do not eat anything except Kanda Moola. By 'Kanda Moola', Kusa bhav meant '*Ratalae*', that is, sweet potatoes, etc.

Baba here played a joke. '*Kanda*' if slightly lengthened in the first vowel, will become '*Kaanda*', which means, onion. Baba then said, "Oh! it is *kaanda* you are eating'. Baba, taking up a piece of onion (*kaanda*), gave it to Kusa Bhav, saying, 'Eat it', Orthodox people have strong objection to eating onions, especially on an Ekadasi day. Kusa Bhav, finding that Baba was forcing on him unorthodox food, said, 'Baba, if you eat it, I will'. Baba had no orthodoxy and no heterodoxy so, he ate some. Kusa bhav also therefore ate some. By this time visitors were arriving. Baba wanted to have some fun, and said 'Look at this

Bamnia (a corrupt and contemptuous expression for Brahmin); he eats onion on an Ekadasi day'. Kusa Bhav explained, 'Baba himself ate it and I did'. But Baba said, 'No I ate *'Kanda'*, that is sweet potatoes, *Ratalai*'. Then Baba vomited *Ratalai*. Here was the wonder. What had been eaten by Baba was onion, and what was vomited was *Ratalai*. This again is *'Yata sankalpa samsiddhi'*, a very high yogic power which is part of Baba's divine equipment of powers. Kusa Bhav was surprised to see Baba's vomiting *Ratalai*, and he fell upon it and ate the vomit. Baba beat him, saying, 'Why, do you eat the vomit?' But Kusa Bhav did not mind it. Baba's heart then melted. And he was anxious to give a blessing that would please Kusa Bhav. What Kusa Bhav wanted was power to produce materials. So, Baba said, 'I hereby give you my blessing. I give you this power. Think of me and hold forth your palm. And in your palm you will have my prasad, that is, warm udhi from the dhuni. Give it and *it will help all the people who receive* it being blessings from me'. It was a very valuable power, which did not require repetition of any mantra, but merely that he should think of Baba and hold forth his palm. But while conferring such a grand benefit on Kusa Bhav and upon others dealing with him, Baba employed his practical joke and played a pun upon the word *'Kanda'* and next vomited one thing when he had eaten another all for the purpose of the practical joke. The end of all the humour and the joke was the conferment on Kusa Bhav of a very valuable power, which he exercised right up to the end of his life. Here again, we see the human and the divine features of Baba, especially the kindness which gave power to a devotee, so closely intermixed with pun and playing tricks. At meal time, it appears he would often be joking with people and taking them eat more and eat heartily. For instance, he might say to one, 'Are you afraid you will be impoverishing Baba's Sansthan? Eat heartily'.

Again, on one occasion, when Hemad Pant (Anna Dabolkar) came to him, there was in the fold of his coat some channa, that is, fried grain, and it fell from his coat; and people were joking at him. That was a day of the fair at Shirdi, and Dabolkar had perhaps been to the fair. Baba, wanting to have a joke at him, said. "Oh! This channa shows that he is in the habit of eating things all by himself

without sharing it with others". Dabolkar was much upset and he protested that he had no such habit. But how the channa got into his dress, he could not explain. Then, Baba made further use of the occasion, and told him, 'When you eat, do you give things to me? Am I not always by your side?' thus impressing on him a very valuable lesson that Baba was present everywhere, and that they should first offer their food to him as their Gurudeva, before taking their food. This is a sacred lesson, and this teaching is divine. But it came out of Baba's humour, and fun poked at Anna Saheb Dabolkar.

On another occasion, Baba wished to impress Dixit and Rege with his wonderful powers and teach them also some humility. Rege had prepared lime syrup, and piqued himself on his cleverness in making such a fine syrup, for he had tasted it and found it excellent. So, he carried it jubilantly to Baba. H.S. Dixit was there, and Baba, when the drink was brought to him, tasted a bit of it, put on a wry face, and told Kaka Dixit, 'Arre Kaka, see how acid this squash is that is given to me.' He passed it on to Rege himself. Rege tasted it, and found it was acid. He was mortified. What, to present to his Guru such a severely acid drink! Immediately Baba smiled, and said, 'I am only *joking*. Now taste each of you. You will find it sweet'. Then Dixit and Rege both tasted the very same liquid, and they found it sweet. We cannot say whether Baba's purpose was merely to play a practical joke or teach his devotees humility. Humour, we find was only Baba's kindly way of dealing with erring human beings.

On another occasion, Baba had to impress a stranger, Kaka Mahajani's master. That man would not easily believe in saints, but was prevailed upon by Mahajani to go with him to see Baba, whose powers were reported to be wonderful, and so he was anxious to see some *chamatkars*. On the way they had purchased at a bazaar *Monakka*, i.e. dried grapes with seeds. When that packet was taken and presented to Baba, Baba took some and gave a portion of it to Kaka Mahajani and his master to taste. The boss (Thakersay Sait) put the grapes into his mouth and ate. Being in a Mosque, he could not spit the seeds. So he was obliged to spit them into his handkerchief and put that in his pocket. He was wondering how Sai Baba, who was said to be an all-knowing person, could fail to

understand this difficulty. Baba knew at once everything that passed in his mind, and immediately offered him some more of the grapes. The very grapes he had brought, namely, the grapes with seeds, were given to him, and Baba said, 'Eat'. So, he had to obey. He was annoyed at having to dirty his handkerchief. But lo! And behold! When these grapes were put into his mouth, they had become seedless grapes. He had himself purchased grapes with seeds, and here were they turned into seedless ones. Here was a *chamatkar* and he was satisfied as he wanted *chamatkars* from Baba. But Baba enjoyed this spectacle of mental puzzles with amusement and also gave him an opportunity to study His powers which is again '*Yata sankalpa samsiddhih*', a power that comes to bhaktas who concentrate their minds on the Lord and whose every wish is therefore immediately effective.

Another case of practical joke is this. This carried with it a moral lesson also showing us the combination of the human and divine elements in Baba. M.B. Rege was a devotee greatly attached to Baba. Once when he sat by Baba's side, somebody brought a bunch of red plantains to be offered to Baba. Young Rege was very fond of these fruits. He thought that Baba would, of course, distribute these plantains amongst all, and he would have an opportunity of having his share of fine red plantains to eat. Baba read his mind at once. Baba then took up the plantains, and after distributing the fruits to all, omitting Rege, he pulled off one fruit, and, having given the pulp to somebody else, threw the red skin alone on Rege saying, '*Khav, Khav*'- eat. It was the red exterior that had attracted young Rege, and the kind but jovial Baba was showing him what the red exterior was. It was no doubt unpalatable, but still Rege's bhakti rose equal to the occasion and he swallowed the skin as though he was a bull. Baba took up a second fruit and a third and went on throwing them to Rege being in a mood for jokes. But at last, he turned to Rege and said, 'Ha! have I given you no fruit?' Then, as he really loved Rege, reluming Rege's powerful love, he peeled off another fruit and asked Rege to bite it off, and then he himself bit off another portion, and thus between them, they finished the plantain. This enjoying one plantain together was a sign of great love, and the joke also had the effect of

impressing on the young devotee the important lesson that externals, which attracted, were really not worth having, the attractive redness of the skin of the red plantain would not give him joy when eaten by itself. Instances of Baba's humour and practical jokes are many.

Another instance of humor is as follows. There was a Ramadasi, who was waiting upon Baba and reading his Vishnu Sahasranama and other holy books at the Mosque. He had the whole thing by heart. And he kept up the parayanam of Vishnu Sahasranama at the Mosque. One day Baba wished to have some fun and teach him a lesson. Baba said he had some stomach trouble, and told the Ramadasi to go to the bazaar to fetch some senna leaves for him. When the Ramadasi left the premises, Baba pulled out his Vishnu Sahasranama and gave it to Shama telling him to keep it and read it. Shama protested that the man would get angry. Baba said, 'Never mind, keep it'. But soon the Ramadasi returned. Then Anna Chinchinikar, wanting to play the role of Narada, told the Ramadasi that his Vishnu Sahasranama had been taken by Baba and given to Shama. Then the Ramadasi got fiery, flared up, and vituperated against Shama for having used Baba to rob him of his sacred book. Baba then said to the Ramadasi, 'Shama is only our child. There is no reason to get angry with him'. Baba said that as far as the Ramadasi was concerned, no book was necessary, because he had the whole thing by heart, and if he was going to get angry for the loss of a book, he was not a '*Ramadasi*' but a '*Kamadasi*'. He was a slave to the sense of property attachment to earthly goods which servants of Rama ought to avoid. So, Baba gave some very sound moral lessons to the Ramadasi. Then Shama too mollified the Ramadasi saying that he would get fresh books - new books - and give them to the Ramadasi. The man was partly mollified. But Baba's practical joke and pun were impressed on the memory of everyone present showing how even for the possession of a sacred book one should not lose one's temper. One should retain equanimity under all circumstances, especially a Ramadasi, that is, a follower of God. This is a spiritual instruction of great value not merely to the Ramadasi but to all. Baba gave that instruction accompanied

with his practical joke so as to impress it on the mind of every one present and every one that reads it.

Baba sometimes used expressions which were apparently foul, abused and cursed against persons present but which were really curses against the evil influences operating on him. This process is a joke though not understood at the time as joke. The famous Gadge Bua, who built his famous and splendid chatrams at Pandharpur and Nasik, was trying to build the Nasik Dharmasala. Funds came up only sufficient for the construction of the ground floor. And then no more funds were forthcoming. His attempt appeared to have some misfortune or set back, spiritual evidently, and so Gadge Bua, who had great reverence for Sai Baba, went to him in order to appeal to him to get over the spiritual hindrances. When he went to Baba and started to tell about the matter, Baba used foul and obscene curses, and at once Gadge Bua began to laugh and Baba also laughed with him. There ended the matter. It looked as though Baba was cursing and abusing and tried to drive away Gadge Bua. But really he was cursing and swearing down the hindrance that prevented Gadge Bua from going on with the construction of his chatram. After this mystic process of abuse, Gadge Bua's obstacles were removed, and funds flowed freely and he completed his Nasik chatram. He has put up Sai Baba's picture in his Dharmasalas.

One other way in which Baba combined humour with a serious religious or spiritual performance was in connection with B. V. Dev. B.V. Dev found that on account of some poorva samskara, he could never complete any parayana or pothi of Jnaneswari. Each time he tried, the effort broke down. So, as Jnaneswari is considered to be the most important of books for pothi or parayana, he went to Baba and Baba demanded considerable dakshinas of Rs. 25 and more. Then Baba sent Dev back. Dev after returning from Baba, met Balakram Manker, and wished to learn from him more about Baba's wonderful powers and asked him for his experience. Balakram Manker promised to mention them the next day, and when next day he was about to start his narration, Baba suddenly sent for Dev, and flared up in anger. He asked Dev, 'What! You are an old man, and in spite of your grey hairs, you indulge in stealing rags! I will kill you with a hatchet'. Dev

was dumbfounded. The effect of being shocked was probably part of the mystic process, which Baba was conducting for his benefit, but Dev understood nothing. Then Baba asked him to go and fetch dakshina. Again Dev produced Rs. 25 and next Rs. 25. Baba asked him, 'What are you reading?' Dev replied, 'Nothing'. Baba asked him, 'Why do you not read pothi such as Jnaneswari?' Baba told him then to go on with that pothi, and said, 'when I am trying to present you with a full lace shawl, you are trying to steal a rag from me'. Dev went on with his Jnaneswari parayana at Shirdi and finished it. That was the first time when he could finish the pothi, and without any hindrance. It was a miracle: His former samskaras were obstructing him till then. Baba gave him a very valuable experience, and it was highly useful to him. A parayana of Jnaneswari, which is a commentary upon Bhagavad Gita, has a high spiritual value, and yet this imparting of the great spiritual benefit was accompanied by a humorous threat that Baba would kill him with a hatchet and Baba's charge against him that he was stealing rags (koupinas). Then Dev understood the point. The rag that he was said to be stealing was the second-hand and third-hand report from Manker of experiences about Baba, whereas the full lace shawl that Baba wanted to give was the direct experience by Dev himself of Baba's overcoming his poorva samskaras that prevented pothi being completed by him. Here again the humour and the pretended anger and the conferment of a great spiritual boon were so nicely intertwined as to be inseparable. It was greatly impressive and never to be forgotten.

Baba's saying 'I am not at Shirdi', when he was actually staying with them at the Mosque, was another instance of humour combined with great spiritual truth. By his statement that he was not at Shirdi, he wished to convey that he was not the physical body seen at Shirdi, but the real personality, which is a divine Force present everywhere especially in the hearts of all people. Baba meanwhile enjoyed the puzzled looks of people who thought that he was talking untruth by denying his presence at Shirdi. This was specially the case with a local lady, who could not understand what Baba meant by his words to Mrs. R. A. Tarkhad. Baba said to the latter, 'Mother, I am going thrice a day to your house in Bandra. Is it

not?' and that lady said, 'yes'. The local lady said, "We are seeing Baba everyday here, and how would he go thrice a day to Bandra, which is 100 miles away?" But Baba said, 'I go to that house'. He then gave a description of the route, there being a railway line, a wall and next the house, etc. The local lady did not understand that Baba was referring to his travelling in his *linga sarira* 10 his devotees' places and accepting the naivedyas, etc., offered there.

Another practical joke played by Baba for effecting good was the following. Kaka Mahajani was suffering from diarrhoea. He had frequent motions and so he had to carry with him a vessel (lota) of water. Along with the lota of water, he had come to the Mosque. Baba knew very well his condition, and when Kaka was there, he suddenly got into a rage and uttered words and acted in such a furious way that all people took to their heels. In the rush and bustle some one seated at the mantap eating groundnuts left the groundnuts and fled for life. Kaka Mahajani thought that he must also go away. But Baba quietly came down to him and asked him to sit. Then they took up the groundnuts left by that stranger, and both of them consumed the groundnuts, and drank water. Now groundnut and water is hardly the best treatment for diarrhoea. In ordinary cases, it would accelerate diarrhoea and make the man miserable. But in this case, Baba said, 'Your anus be closed' and the discharge ceased. Kaka Mahajani was cured. Baba had used his apparent fury for the purpose of securing groundnuts for his devotee.

Another humorous incident has already been mentioned. When Mr. Sadasiva Tarkhad who was not employed came to Baba hoping to find employment with Baba's aid, Baba suddenly ordered him to go back to Poona in company with Tatya Patil and others who were going to Ahmednagar to see a film. This looked very cruel and heartless, nay horrid, to send the man back without job and asking him to go and attend to amusement, when there was no provision for him to earn his bread. But he went with them to Ahmednagar and thence to Poona. At Poona he found that a local mill was needing a manager badly, as the labourers had given trouble and a capable manager was wanted. The mill authorities had been sending telegrams to find out where Sadasiva

Tarkhad was. Baba knowing of it, yet humorously omitting to inform him sent him back in time to get the mill managership.

One day a very old goat, just on the eve of death strayed into the Mosque Mantap. Baba asked Bade Baba to cut it with a knife. Bade Baba's heart revolted against this needless cruelty, and he left the Mosque. Baba asked Shama to fetch a knife from Ayi and kill it. Ayi sent the knife, but learning that it was for killing the dying goat, recalled the knife. Again Shama professing to go out for another knife decamped. Baba was enjoying the humour all the time. Then he sent for H.S. Dixit and asked him to fetch a knife and kill it. Dixit was the soul of obedience to Baba, and he was very intimately attached to Baba. So he took up a knife in his hand and asked Baba, 'Shall I kill it?' 'Yes' said Baba. Then he still hesitated. Baba said, "Why are you hesitating?" Then Dixit determined to kill it, for with him obedience to Baba was superior to sympathy for creatures. As Dixit was just lowering his knife over the head of the animal, Baba suddenly stopped him, and said, 'Do not kill the animal, I will myself kill it.' Then he took up the animal over his shoulders and walked a few paces. The creature then breathed its last. Baba knew full well what was going to happen, and was only enjoying the fun, and also testing the mental development of devotees. This test showed the perfection of Dixit's devotion.

There are many more instances of Baba's humour but it seems to be hardly necessary to labour the point. Baba like every other human being appreciated a humorous situation and he indulged in the humour not merely because it was natural but also because the human side must be presented to devotees along with his divine side so that they may be able to have the courage to grasp the Baba personality. Without the human, the divine part of Baba's personality could not be so well grasped and utilised by the devotees. One more excellent illustration of how the two combined in another saint may be the close of this chapter.

The late Sri C.N. Kuppuswami Iyer, Judge of the High Court of Madras, in trying to recall Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, for whom he had the highest reverence, said, 'I see now before my mind's eye the smiling face and the one

protruding single solitary tooth projecting from behind his lip and his uttering valuable and sacred lessons for people to learn'. Thus, it is the physical personality with the peculiarity of one protruding tooth that constituted the human element with which the divine element of presenting holy and lofty truths was intertwined in the judge's memory. That is an excellent illustration to show how we remember clearly what seems to be irrelevant human features. The irrelevant human feature comes in just a position with which the divine is drawn and made use of. This is very frequently the case, and that is why we are asked to study Avatars and deal with Bhagavatas, before realising the nature of Bhagvan. We get at Bhagvan through the Bhagavatas. We get at God through the Saint and not otherwise, *daivam manusha rupena* is an oftquoted saying. So the human is wanted, the human in the Bhagavata and the saint. That is why there are prayers in Srimad Bhagavata (Skanda 5, Chapter 11, verse 24) in which the devotee prays to God:

*Aham hare tavapadaikamoola dasanudaso bhavitasmi bhuyah
Manasmareta asitpateh gunante grinita vak karma karotu kayah.*

This means, 'May I, O! Hari, be born again (after death) as a servant of those devotees who have solely taken refuge in Your (lotus) feet. Let my mind ponder over and my tongue celebrate the excellences of the Lord of my life, and let my body do your service'.

The highest Bhagavata who has lived in modern days and whose Ofame has reached us, is Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi, always absorbed in God with "*Allah Malik*" ever on his lips and in his heart, resigning all doership to God and ever intent on serving Him in all His forms of living beings, and ever desiring service, loving service, not salvation nor annihilation, nor total merger in Brahman.

Na naka prishtam, Na cha parameshtyam, Na sarvabhowmam, Na rasadhipatyam, Na yogasiddhir apunarbhavam Va, Samanjasa Twa virahasya kankshe, which means, 'I do not long for Heaven nor Brahmaloaka, nor rulership of this entire world nor of the Rasatala world, nor all the Yoga siddhis, nor escape from Rebirth, O God! if thereby I am to be without you'.