



CHAPTER IV

SAI BABA'S FIRST ADVENT IN SHIRDI

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In the last chapter, I described the circumstances, which led me to write Sai Satcharita. Let me now describe the first advent of Sai Baba in Shirdi.

Mission of the Saints

Lord Krishna says in Bhagvad Gita (Chapter IV, 7-8) that, "Whenever there is a decay of Dharma (righteousness) and an ascendancy of unrighteousness, I manifest Myself, for the protection of the virtuous and the destruction of the vicious; and for the establishment of righteousness, I manifest Myself Age after Age."

This is the mission of to Lord, and the sages and saints, who are His representatives, and who appear at appropriate times and work in their own way to fulfil that mission. For instance, when the twice-born, i.e. the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas neglect their duties, and when the Shudras try to usurp the duties of other classes, when spiritual preceptors are not respected but humiliated, when nobody cares for religious instructions, when everybody thinks himself very learned, when people begin to partake of forbidden foods and intoxicating drinks, when under the cloak of religion people indulge in malpractices, when people belonging to different sects fight amongst themselves, when Brahmins fail to do Sandhya adoration, and the orthodox leave their religious practices, when Yogis neglect their meditation, when people begin to think that, wealth, progeny, wife are their sole concern; and thus, turn away from the true path of salvation then, saints appear and try to set matters right by their words and action. They serve us as beacon-lights, and show us the path, and the right way for us to follow. In this way, many saints viz., Nivrutti, Dnyandev, Muktabai, Namdev, Gora, Gonayi, Eknath, Tukaram, Narahari, Narsi Bhai, Sajan Kasai, Sawata,

Ramdas and various others did appear at various times to show the right path to the people, and so, the present advent came as Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi.

Shirdi – a Holy Tirth

The banks of the Godavari river, in the Ahmednagar district, are very fortunate for they gave birth and refuge to many a saint, prominent amongst them being Dnyaneshwar. Shirdi also falls in the Kopargaon Taluka or the Ahmednagar district. After crossing the Godavari river at Kopargaon, one gets on way to Shirdi. When you go three Kos¹ (9 miles), you come to Nimgaon, from where, Shirdi is visible. Shirdi is, as famous and well-known as other holy places, like Gangapur, Nrisinhawadi, Audumbar, on the banks of Krishna river. As the devotee Damoji flourished, and blessed Mangalvedha (near Pandharpur), as Samarth Ramdas at Sajjangad, as Shri Nrisimha Saraswati at Saraswatiwadi, so, Sainath flourished at Shirdi and blessed it.

Personality of Sai Baba

It is on account of Shri Sai Baba that Shirdi grew into importance. Let us see, what sort of a personage Sai Baba was. He conquered this Sansar (worldly existence), which is very difficult and hard to cross. Peace or mental calm was His ornament, and He was the repository of wisdom. He was the home of Vaishnav devotees, most generous (like Karna) amongst all, the quint-essence of all essences. He had no love for perishable things, and was always engrossed in self-realization, which was His sole concern. He felt no pleasure in the things of this world or of the world beyond. His Antarang (heart) was as clear as a mirror, and His speech always rained nectar. The rich or poor people were the same to Him. He neither knew nor cared for honour or dishonour. He was the Lord of all beings. He spoke freely and mixed with all people, watched the actings and dances of nautch-girls and heard gazal-songs. Still, He swerved not an inch from samadhi (mental equilibrium). The name of Allah was always on His lips. While the world awoke He slept, and while the world slept He was vigilant. His inner self was as calm as the deep sea, His Ashram could not be determined, nor His actions could be definitely determined; and though He sat (lived) in one place, He

1. Kos = 3 miles = 4.8 km.

knew all the transactions of the world. His Darbar was imposing. He told hundreds of stories daily, still He swerved not an inch from His vow of silence. He always leaned against the wall in the Masjid or walked morning, noon and evening towards Lendi (Nala) and Chavadi, still He at all times abided in the Self. Though a Siddha, He acted like a Sadhaka. He was meek, humble and egoless, and pleased all. Such was Sai Baba, and as the soil of Shirdi was trodden by Sai Baba's Feet, it attained extraordinary importance. As Dnyaneshwar elevated Alandi, Eknath did to Paithan, so Sai Baba raised Shirdi. Blessed are the grass-leaves and stones of Shirdi, for they could kiss the Holy Feet of Sai Baba, and take his dust on their head. Shirdi became to us devotees, another Pandharpur, Jagannath, Dwarka, Benaras (Kashi) and Rameshwar, Badrikedar, Nasik, Tryambakeshwar, Ujjain and Maha Kaleshwar or Mahabaleshwar Gokarn. Contact of Sai Baba in Shirdi was like our study of Veda and Tantra; it quietened our Sansar (world consciousness) and rendered self-realization. The darshan of Shri Sai was our Yoga-sadhana, and talk with Him removed our sins. Shampooing His Legs was our bath in Triveni Prayag, and drinking the holy water of His Feet destroyed our sins. To us, His commands were Vedas, and accepting (eating) His Udi (sacred ashes) and Prasad was all purifying. He was our Shri Krishna and Shri Ram, Who gave us solace, and He was our Para Brahma (Absolute Reality). He was Himself beyond the pair of Dwandwas (opposites), never dejected nor elated. He was always engrossed in His Self as 'Existence, Knowledge and Bliss.' Shirdi was His centre, but His field of action extended far beyond, to Punjab, Calcutta, North India, Gujarat, Dacca (now in Bangladesh) and Konkan. Thus, the fame of Sai Baba spread, far and wide, and people from all parts came to take His darshan and be blessed. By mere darshan, minds of people, whether pure or impure, would become quiet at once. They got here the same unparalleled joy that, devotees get at Pandharpur by seeing Vitthal Rakhumai. This is not an exaggeration. Consider, what a devotee says in this respect.

Dictum of Goulibua

An old devotee, by name Goulibua, aged about 95 years, was a Varkari of Pandhari. He stayed for 8 months at Pandharpur and for four months – Ashadha to Kartik (July – November) on the banks of the Ganges. He had a donkey with him for carrying his luggage, and a disciple as his companion. Every year he made his Vari or trip to

Pandharpur and came to Shirdi to see Sai baba, Whom he loved most. He used to gaze at Baba saying, "This is Pandharinath Vitthal incarnate, the merciful Lord of the poor and helpless." This Goulubua was an old devotee of Vitthoba, and had made many a trip to Pandhari; and he testified that Sai Baba was real Pandharinath.

Vitthal Himself Appeared

Sai Baba was very fond of remembering and singing God's name. He always uttered "Allah Malik" (God is Lord), and in His presence made others sing God's name continuously, day and night, for all 7 days of the week. This is called 'Naamsaptah'. Once He asked Das Ganu Maharaj to do the Naamsaptah. He replied that he would do it, provided he was assured that, Vitthal would appear at the end of the 7th day. Then, Baba placing His hand on His chest assured him that, certainly Vitthal would appear, but for that the devotee must be 'earnest and devout'. The Dankapuri (Takore) of Dakurnath, the Pandhari of Vitthal, the Dwarka of Ranchhod (Krishna) is here (Shirdi). One need not go far out to see Dwarka. Will Vitthal come here from some outside place? He is here! **Only when the devotee is bursting with love and devotion, Vitthal will manifest Himself here (Shirdi).***

After the Saptah was over, Vitthal did manifest Himself in the following manner. Kakasaheb Dixit was, as usual, sitting in meditation after his bath. He saw Vitthal in a vision. When he went at noon for Baba's darshan, Baba asked him point-blank, "Did Vitthal Patil come? Did you see Him? He is a very truant fellow, catch Him firmly, otherwise, He will escape if you are even a little inattentive". This

* Mr. B.V. Deo, retired Mamlatdar of Thana has proved by his researches that, Shirdi comes in the limits of Pandharpur, which was the southern-most centre of Dwarka and, therefore, Shirdi was Dwarka itself. (Vide Sai Leela, Vol. 14, Nos. 1-2-3) I have come across another definition of Dwarka, quoted from Skanda Puran by K. Narayan Aiyar in his Permanent History of Bharatvarsha, Vol. 2, Part 1, Page 90, which runs thus:

चतुर्णामपि वर्गाणां यत्राद्वाराणि सर्वतः ।
अतो द्वारावतीत्युक्ता विद्वन्दिस्तत्ववेदिभिः ॥

The place, where doors are open for all people, of the four (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra) classes, for accomplishing the four Purusharthas, viz., Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha, is called Dwarka by the wise philosophers. Baba's Masjid in Shirdi was not only open to the four classes, but to the oppressed, untouchables, lepers etc., like Bhagoji Shinde and, therefore, it is very appropriately styled as the Dwarka.

happened in the morning and at noon there was another Vitthal darshan. A hawker came there for selling 25 or 30 pictures of Vithoba. This picture exactly tallied with the figure that had appeared in Kakasaheb's vision. On seeing this and remembering Baba's words, Kakasaheb Dixit was much surprised and delighted. He bought one picture of Vithoba, and placed it in his shrine for worship.

Bhagwantrao Kshirsagar's Story

How fond was Baba for Vitthal worship was illustrated in Bhagwantrao Kshirsagar's story. The father of Bhagwantrao was a devotee of Vithoba, and used to make Varis (annual trips) to Pandharpur. He also had an image of Vithoba at home, which he worshipped. After his death, the son stopped everything – the Vari, the worship and Shraddha ceremony etc. When Bhagwantrao came to Shirdi, Baba on remembering his father, at once said, "His father was my friend, so I dragged him (the son) here. He never offered Naivaidya (offering of food) and so, he starved Vitthal and Me. So, I brought him here. I shall remonstrate him now and set him to worship."

Das Ganu's Bath in Prayag

The Hindus think that, a bath in the holy Tirth of Prayag¹, where the Ganga and Yamuna meet, is very meritorious and thousands of pilgrims go there periodically, to have the sacred bath there. Once, Das Ganu thought that, he should go to Prayag for a bath and came to Baba to get His permission for doing so. Baba replied to him, "**It is not necessary to go so far. Our Prayag is here, believe Me!**" Then, wonder of wonders! When Das Ganu placed his head on Baba's Feet, out flowed streams of Ganga-Yamuna water from both the toes of Baba. Seeing this miracle, Das Ganu was overwhelmed with feelings of love and adoration, and tears filled my eyes. Inwardly he felt inspired, and his speech burst forth into a song in praise of Baba and His Leelas.

Immaculate Conception of Sai Baba and His First Advent in Shirdi

Nobody knew the parents, birth or birth-place of Sai Baba. Many enquiries were made, many questions were put to Baba and others,

1. Prayag – Allahabad in U.P.

regarding these, but no satisfactory answer or information has yet been obtained. Practically, we know nothing about these matters. Namdev and Kabir were not born like ordinary mortals. They were found as infants in mother-of-pearls; Namdev being found on the bank Bhimrathi river by Gonayi, and Kabir on the bank Bhagirathi river by Tamal. Similar was the case with Sai Baba. He first manifested Himself as a young lad of sixteen years under a Neem tree in Shirdi, for the sake of Bhaktas. Even then, He seemed to be full of the knowledge of Brahma. He had no desire for worldly objects even in dreams. He kicked out Maya, and Mukti (deliverance) was serving at His feet. One old woman of Shirdi, the mother of Nana Chopdar, described Him thus; this young lad, fair, smart and very handsome, was first seen under the Neem tree, seated in an Asan. The people of the village were wonder-struck to see such a young lad practising hard penance, not minding heat and cold. By day he associated with none, by night he was afraid of nobody. People were wondering and asking, whence this young chap had turned up. His form and features were so beautiful that a mere look endeared Him to all. He went to nobody's door, always sat near the Neem tree. Outwardly, he looked very young, but by His action He was really a Great Soul. He was the embodiment of dispassion and was an enigma to all. One day, it so happened that God Khandoba possessed the body of some devotee and people began to ask him, "Deva (God), You please enquire, what blessed father's son is this lad and whence did He come." God Khandoba asked them to bring a pick-axe and dig in a particular place. When it was dug, bricks were found underneath a flat stone. When the stone was removed, a corridor was seen, in which four Samayis (lights) were burning. The corridor led to a cellar, where cow-mouth-shaped structures, wooden boards, rosaries were seen. Khandoba said, "This lad practised penance here for 12 years." Then, the people began to question the lad about this. He put them off by telling them that, this was His Guru's place, His holy Watan, and requested them to guard this well. The people then closed the corridor as before. As Ashwattha and Audumbar trees are held sacred, Baba regarded this Neem tree equally sacred, and loved it most. Mhalsapati and other Shirdi devotees regard this site as the resting place (Samadhi-sthan) of Baba's Guru and prostrate before it.

Three Wadas

(1) The site with the Neem tree and surrounding space was bought by Mr. Hari Vinayak Sathe, and on this site a big building styled Sathe's Wada was erected. This Wada was the sole resting place for pilgrims,

who flocked there. A platform was built round the Neem tree and lofts with steps were constructed. Under the steps, there is a niche facing south and devotees sit on the Par (platform) facing north. It is believed that, he, who burns incense there on Thursday and Friday evenings, will by God's grace, be happy. This Wada was old and dilapidated and needed repairs. The necessary repairs, additions and alterations have been made now by the Sansthan. (2) Then, after some years, another Wada, Dixit's Wada was constructed. Kakasaheb Dixit, Solicitor of Mumbai, had gone to England. He had injured his leg in an accident there. The injury could not be got rid of by any means. Nanasaheb Chandorkar advised him to see Sai Baba. So, he went to Sai Baba in 1909, and requested Him to cure the lameness of his mind rather than that of his leg. He was so much pleased with the darshan of Sai Baba, that he decided to reside in Shirdi. So, he built a Wada for himself and other devotees. The foundation of this building was laid on 10-12-1910. On this day, two other important events took place. (1) Mr. Dadasaheb Khaparde was given permission to return home, and (2) The night Arati at the chavadi was started. The Wada was completed and was inhabited on the Ram Navami day in 1911, with due rites and formalities. (3) Then, another Wada or palatial mansion was put up by the famous millionaire, Mr. Buti, of Nagpur. A lot of money was spent on this building, but it was all well utilized, as Sai Baba's Body is resting in this Wada, which is now called the 'Samadhi Mandir'. The site of this Mandir formerly had a garden, which was watered and looked after by Baba. Three Wadas thus came up, where there was none formerly. Of these Sathe's Wada was most useful to all, in the early days.

The story of the garden which was attended by Sai Baba with the help of Vaman Taty, the temporary absence of Sai Baba from Shirdi, and His coming again to Shirdi with the marriage-party of Chand Patil, the company of Devidas, Jankidas and Gangagir, Baba's wrestling match with Mohiddin Tamboli, residing in the Masjid, love of Mr. Denge and other devotees; and other incidents will be described in the next chapter.

Bow to Shri Sai – Peace be to all