

LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF SHRI SHIRDI SAIBABA - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research paper is to reviews the Life and Teachings of Shri Shirdi Sai Baba in a historical perspective and Saibaba holds a Unique place in the rich tradition of Saints in India. The type of research was a normative research with legal, historical, and conceptual approach. Research is conducted qualitatively with library research within Primary and Secondary legal sources. The outcomes of the research indicate that the Shirdi Saibaba is worshiped by people around the world. He taught a moral code of love, forgiveness, helping others, charity, contentment, inner peace, and devotion to God and Guru. He gave no distinction based on religion or caste. Sai Baba's teaching combined elements of Hinduism and Islam. He gave the Hindu name "Dwarakamai" to the mosque in which he lived, practiced Muslim rituals, taught using words and figures that drew from both traditions, and was buried in Shirdi. One of his well known epigrams, "Sabka Malik Ek" ("One God governs all"), is associated with Hinduism, Islam and Sufism. He also said, "Trust in me and your prayer shall be answered". He always uttered "Allah Malik" ("God is King"). Being an embodiment of self-realisation and perfection, his mission on earth was not solely to preach, but to awaken mankind through his message of love and righteousness.

Key Words: Dwarakamai, Sabka Malik EK, Allah Malik, Embodiment, Self-realisation, Contentment.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. LIFE HISTORY OF SHIRDI SAI BABA

The name "Sai" was given to him upon his arrival at Shirdi, a town in the *West Indian State of Maharashtra*. Mhalsapati, a local temple priest, recognized him as a Muslim Saint and greeted him with the words, **Ya Sai!** meaning "Welcome Sai!". According to the book *Shirdi Sai Satcharita*, Sai Baba arrived at the village of Shirdi in the Ahmednagar District of Maharashtra, British India, when he was about 16 years old. He led an ascetic life, sitting motion less under a neem tree and meditating while sitting in an asana. The *Shri Sai Satcharita* recounts the reaction of the villagers:

The people of the village were wonder-struck to see such a young lad practising hard penance, not minding heat or cold. By day he associated with no one, by night he was afraid of nobody.

His presence attracted the curiosity of the villagers, and he was regularly visited by the religiously inclined, including *Mhalsapati, Appa Jogle and Kashinatha*. There are some indications that he met with many Saints and Fakirs, and worked as a Weaver. He claimed to have been with the army

of Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi during the **Indian Rebellion of 1857**. It is generally accepted that Sai Baba stayed in Shirdi for three years, disappeared for a year, and returned permanently.

1.2. RETURN TO SHIRDI

In the year 1858 Sai Baba returned to Shirdi. For four to five years Baba lived under a neem tree and often wandered for long periods in the jungle around Shirdi. His manner was said to be withdrawn and uncommunicative as he undertook long periods of meditation. He was eventually persuaded to take up residence in an old and dilapidated mosque and lived a solitary life there, surviving by begging for alms, and receiving itinerant Hindu or Muslim visitors. In the mosque he maintained a sacred fire which is referred to as a *dhuni*, from which he gave **Sacred ashes ('Udi')** to his guests before they left. The ash was believed to have healing and apotropaic powers. He performed the function of a local hakim and treated the sick by application of ashes. Sai Baba also delivered Spiritual teachings to his visitors, recommending the reading of **the Quran**. He insisted on the indispensability of the unbroken remembrance of God's name (*dhikr, japa*) and often expressed himself in a cryptic manner with the use of **Parables, Symbols and Allegories**. After 1910 Sai Baba's fame began to spread in Mumbai. Numerous people started visiting him, because they regarded him as a **Saint** with the power of performing miracles or even as an **Avatar**. They built his first temple at **Bhivpuri, Karjat**.

1.3. TEACHINGS AND PRACTICES

Sai Baba opposed all persecution based on religion or caste. He was an opponent of religious orthodoxy - **Christian, Hindu and Muslim**.

Sai Baba encouraged his devotees to pray, chant God's name, and read Holy Scriptures. He told Muslims to study the Quran and Hindus to study texts such as the **Ramayana, Bhagavad Gita, and Yoga Vasishtha**. He was impressed by the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita and encouraged people to follow it in their own lives. He advised his devotees and followers to lead a moral life, help others, love every living being without any discrimination, and develop two important features of Character: **devotion to the Guru (Shradda) and waiting cheerfully with Patience and Love (Saburi)**. He criticised atheism.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The material to be discussed in this paper is, in his teachings, Shirdi Sai Baba emphasised the importance of performing one's duties without attachment to earthly matters and of being content regardless of the situation. Sai Baba interpreted the religious texts of both Islam and Hinduism. He explained the meaning of the Hindu Scriptures in the spirit of **Advaita Vedanta**. His Philosophy also had numerous elements of bhakti. The three main Hindu Spiritual Paths — **Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga, and Karma Yoga** — influenced his teachings.

3. METHOD OF RESEARCH

The type of research used in this paper is normative research, reviewing the Shirdi Sai Baba's worshiping traits, claimed miracles and about his devotees in India and abroad from the historical dimensions.

3.1. WORKSHIP AND DEVOTEES

The Shirdi Sai Baba movement began in the 19th century, while he was living in Shirdi. A local Khandoba priest, *Mhalsapati Nagre*, is believed to have been his *First devotee*. In the 19th century Sai Baba's followers were only a small group of Shirdi inhabitants and a few people from other parts of India.

Because of Sai Baba, Shirdi has become a place of importance and is counted among the major Hindu places of pilgrimage. The Sai Baba Mandir in Shirdi is visited by around **20,000 pilgrims a day** and during religious festivals, this number can reach up to **1,00,000**. Shirdi Sai Baba is especially revered and worshiped in the states of *Maharashtra, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat*. The Shirdi Sai Movement has spread to the *Caribbean* and to countries such as the *Nepal, Canada, United States, Australia, United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, United Kingdom, Germany, France and Singapore*.

3.1.1. CLAIMED MIRACLES

Sai Baba's disciples and devotees claim that he performed many miracles such as *bilocation, levitation, mind reading, materialisation, exorcisms*, making the river Yamuna, entering a State of Samādhi at will, lighting lamps with water, removing his limbs or intestines and sticking them back to his body (*khanda yoga*), curing the incurably sick, appearing beaten when another was beaten, preventing a mosque from falling down on people, and helping his devotees in a miraculous way. He also gave Darshan (vision) to people in the form of *Sri Rama, Krishna, Vithoba, Shiva* and many other gods depending on the faith of devotees. According to his followers he appeared to them in dreams and gave them advice. His devotees have documented many stories.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. SAI BABA'S PROPHECY

Sai Baba encouraged some devotees to do their own business and when one of his devotee named Damu Anna Kasar of Ahmednagar went to Shirdi about the year **1895 A.D.** when the *Ram Navami Utsav Celebration* began and since that time, he has been providing an ornamental flag, for that occasion every year. He also feeds the poor and the Fakirs, who come there for the festival.

4.2. COTTON TRADING

A Mumbai friend of Damu Anna wrote to him that, they should do some **Cotton-Speculation business** in partnership, which would bring them about two lakhs of rupees as profit. The broker wrote that, that the business was good and involved no risks, and that the opportunity should not be lost. Damu Anna was vacillating. He could not at once determine to venture in to the speculation. He thought over this, and as he was a **devotee of Baba**, he wrote a detailed letter to *Shama* giving all the facts and requested him to consult Baba and take his advice in the matter. Shama got the letter next day, and when he went with it at noon to the Masjid and placed it before Baba. He asked Shama, what the matter was and what the letter was about. He replied that, *Damu Anna of Nagar* wanted to consult him about something. Then Baba said, "*what does he write, and what does he plan?*". It seems that he wants to

reach the sky and he is not content with, what god has given him, read his letter!". Shama then said, *"The letter contains what you have just said. Oh! Deva, You sit here calm and composed and agitate the devotees and when they get restless, you draw them here, some in person and others through letters". Baba said, Oh! Shama! read it.*

Then Shama read the letter and Baba heard it attentively and said feelingly, *"The Sheth (Damu Anna) has Gone mad, write to him in reply that, nothing is wanting in his house, let him be content with the half loof (bread) he has and not bother himself about lakhs"*. Shama sent the reply, which Damu Anna was anxiously waiting for. After reading it he found that, all his hopes and prospects about lakhs of rupees as profit, were dashed to the ground. He thought that, he had made a mistake by consulting **Baba**. But, as Shama had hinted in the reply that, there was always much difference in seeing and hearing and that therefore, he should come to **Shirdi** personally and *see Baba*. He thought, it was advisable to go to **Shirdi**, saw Baba, prostrated himself before him, but no courage to ask Baba openly about the **Speculation**; but he thought in his mind that, it would be better, if some share in the business were assigned to Baba, and said in his mind that if Baba were to help him in this transaction, he would surrender some share of profits to him. Damu Anna was thus thinking secretly in his mind, but nothing was veiled from **Baba; everything, past, present and future**, were clear to him, a child wants sweets, but his Mother gives bitter pills the former spoil his health, while the latter improve it. So the Mother, looking to the welfare of her infant, coaxes and gives bitter pills. Baba, kind Mother as he was, knew the present and future prospects of his devotees and therefore reading, **Damu Anna's mind**, he openly spoke to him, *"Bapu, I do not want to be entangled in any such worldly things (sharing profit)". On seeing Baba's disapproval, Damu Anna dropped the enterprise.*

4.2.1. GRAIN DEALING

Then **Damu Anna** thought of trading in **rice, wheat and other grains**. Baba read this thought also and said to him, *"You will be buying of five seers and selling of Seven seers a rupee!"*. So this business was also given up. The rise in the prices of grains was kept up for sometime and Baba's prophecy seemed to be falsified, but in month or two, there was abundant rain everywhere and the prices suddenly fell down and therefore, those, who stored grains suffered a severe losses. Damu Anna was saved from this fate. Needless to say, that cotton speculation, which was conducted by the broker with the help of another merchant, also collapsed with severe loss, to the adventurers. After seeing that, **Baba had saved him, from two severe losses in Cotton and Grain speculations**, Damu Anna's faith in Baba stronger and he remained a true devotee of Baba till his passing away.

In this way many lakhs of dedicated devotees engaged in Shirdi Sai Movement. In **August 2012**, an unidentified devotee for the first time donated *two costly diamonds valuing Rs. 11.8 million* at the Shirdi temple, Saibaba Trust officials revealed.

Mumbai entrepreneur presented *40 kg silver throne* worth *Rs. 27 lakhs of Sai Baba's "Chavadi"* where Baba used to stay. The businessman has requested the Sansthan that not to reveal his name. Meanwhile, thousands of people thronged to Shirdi today to take Baba's blessings.

4.2. CHENNAI ENTREPRENEUR DONATED Rs. 110 CRORES TO SHIRDI SAI BABA

K.V. Ramani, the Co-founder of Nasscom, that represents and sets the tone for public policy for the Indian Software Industry is also a successful entrepreneur who founded *Chennai Future based Software* and co-founded *Hughes Software in Delhi*. Ramani was not only a entrepreneur, but also a well known philanthropist. His philanthropic activities can inspire many entrepreneurs to follow this path. Ramani was recently in news for one such activity where he built and donated *Sai Ashram for Rs. 110 crores* and handed it over to *Shri Saibaba Sansthan*. This Ashram will formally be inaugurated by *President Pranab Mukherjee*. Apart from this, *Ramani also extends his services by donating 80 percent of his total earnings to the Shirdi Sai Trust. A Delhi based entrepreneur* and devotee of Saibaba has offered to construct an *Airport of Shirdi on “Built, Operated and Transfer” (B.O.T) Basis*.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on results and discussion above, to conclude that, it is clearly established, beyond any shadow of doubt, that **Shri Shirdi Saibaba** was the Saint, Saviour of mankind Par Excellence. He was a matchless and the greatest contemporary Incarnation of God, whose Charismatic divine personality as a *Prophet or Godman, has been influencing, moulding, saving spiritualizing and granting liberation to countless persons*.

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