



SRI SAI SATCHARITRA

Chapter IV

SAI BABA'S FIRST ADVENT IN SHIRDI

Mission of the Saints - Shirdi a Holy Tirth - Personality of Sai Baba - Dictum of Goulibuva - Appearance of Vithal - Kshirsagar's Story - Das Ganu's Bath in Prayag - Immaculate Conception of Sai Baba and His First Advent in Shirdi - Three Wadas.

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

Mission of the Saints.

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

This is the mission of Lord, and the Sages and Saints, Who are His representatives and who appear here at proper times, help 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 rights of the higher classes, when spiritual preceptors are not respected but humiliated, when nobody cares for religious instructions, when every body 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 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 do Saints appear and try to set matters right by their words and action. They serve us as beacon-lights, and show us the right path, and the right way for us to follow. In this way, many saints, viz. Nivrutti, Jnanadev, Muktabai, Namdev, Gora, Gonayi, Ekanath, 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 presently came 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 Jnaneshwar. Shirdi also falls in the Kopergaon Taluka of the Ahmednagar District. After crossing the Godavari River at Kopergaon, one gets the way to Shirdi. When you go three Koss (9 miles), you come to Nimgaon, from whence; Shirdi is visible. Shirdi is as

famous and well known as other holy places like Gangapur, Narsinhwadi, Audumbar on the banks of Krishna River. As the devotee Damaji flourished in and blessed Mangalvedha (near Pandharpur) as Samarth Ramdas at Sajjangad, as Shri Narasimha Saraswati at Saraswatiwadi, so Sainath flourished at Shirdi and blessed it.

Personality of Sai Baba

It is on account of Sai Baba that Shirdi grew into importance. Let us see what sort of a personage Sai Baba was. He conquered this Samsar (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 Vaishnava devotees, most liberal (like Karna) amongst liberals, 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 did not know or care for honour or dishonour. He was the Lord of all beings. He spoke freely and mixed with all people, saw the actings and dances of Nautchgirls and heard Gajjal 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 abdomen (Inside) 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 knew all the transactions of the world. His Darbar was imposing. He told daily hundreds of stories; 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 Sai Baba's Feet treaded the soil of Shirdi, it attained extraordinary importance. As jnaneshwar elevated Alandi, Ekanath did to Paithan, so Sai Baba raised Shirdi. Blessed are the grass-leaves and stones of Shirdi, for they could easily kiss the Holy Feet of Sai Baba, and take their dust on their head.

Shirdi became to us, devotees, another Pandharpur, Jagannath, Dwarka, Banaras (Kashi) and Rameshwar, Badrikedar, Nasik, Tryambakeshwar, Ujjain, and Maha Kaleshwar or Mahabaleshwar Gokarn. Contact of Sai Baba in Shirdi was like our Veda and Tantra; it quieted our Samsara (world consciousness) and rendered self-realization easy. The darshana 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 desires. 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 Rama who gave us solace and He was our Para Brahma (Absolute Reality). He was Himself beyond the Pair of dwandwas (opposite), 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 wide, 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 darshana and be blessed. By mere darshan, minds of people, whether, pure or impure, would become at once quiet. They got here the same sort of unparalleled joy that devotees get at Pandharpur by seeing Vithal Rakhumai. This is not an exaggeration. Consider what a devotee says in this respect.

Dictum of Goulibuva

An old devotee by name Goulibuva, aged about 95 years, was a Varkari of Pandhari. He stayed 8 months at Pandharpur and four months - Ashadha to Kartik (July - November) on the banks of the Ganges. He had an ass 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 stare at Baba and say, "This is Pandharinath Vithal incarnate, the merciful Lord of the poor and helpless." This

Goulibuva was an old devotee of Vithoba, and had made many a trip to Pandhari; and he testified that Sai Baba was real Pandharinath.

Vithal 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 7 days. This is called Namasaptaha. Once He asked Das Ganu Maharaj to do the Namasaptaha. He replied that he would do it, provided he was assured that Vithal would appear at the end of the 7th day. Then Baba, placing His hand on his breast assured him that certainly Vithal would appear, but that the devotee must be 'earnest and devout'. The Dankapuri (Takore) of Takurnath, the Pandhari of Vithal, the Dwarka of Ranchhod (Krishna) is here (Shirdi). One need not go far out to see Dwarka. Will Vithal come here from some outside place? He is here. Only when the devotee is bursting with love and devotion, Vithal will manifest Himself here (Shirdi).

After the Saptaha was over, Vithal did manifest Himself in the following manner. Kakasaheb Dixit was, as usual, sitting in meditation after the bath, and he saw Vithal in a vision. When he went at noon for Baba's darshana, Baba asked him point-blank - "Did Vithal Patil come? Did you see Him? He is a very truant fellow, catch Him firmly, otherwise, he will escape, if you be a little inattentive." This happened in the morning and at noon there was another Vithal darshana. One hawker from outside came there for selling 25 or 30 pictures of Vithoba. This picture exactly tallied with the figure that 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 Vithal 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 Vithal 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 Prayag, where the Ganga and Yamuna meet, is very meritorious and thousands of pilgrims go there, at periodical times, 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 long. Our Prayag is here, believe me." Then wonder of wonders! When Das Ganu placed his head on Baba's Feet, out came or 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 was full of tears. 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 birthplace of Sai Baba. Many inquiries were made, many questions were put to Baba and others regarding these items, 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 Gonayee, 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 under a Neem tree in Shirdi, for the sake of Bhaktas. Even then He seemed to be full with the knowledge of Brahman. He had no desire for worldly objects even in

dream. 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 pickaxe and dig in a particular place. When it was dug, bricks were found underneath a flat stone. When the stone was removed, a corridor led to a cellar where cow-mouth-shaped structures, wooden boards, necklaces were seen. Khandoba said - "This lad practiced penance here for 12 years." Then the people began to question the lad about this. He put them off the scent by telling them that it was His Guru's place, His holy Watan and requested them to guard it 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. Mhalasapati and other Shirdi devotees regard this site as the resting place (Samadhi-Sthana) 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 Par (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 wanted repairs. The Sansthan has made the necessary repairs, additions and alterations now. (2) Then after some years another Wada, Dixit's Wada was constructed. Kakasaheb Dixit, Solicitor of Bombay, had gone to England. He had injured his leg by an accident there. The injury could not be got rid of by any means. Nanasaheb Chandorkar advised him to try Sai Baba. So he saw Sai Baba in 1909 A.D., and requested Him to cure rather the lameness of his mind than that of his leg. He was so much pleased with the darshana 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 Arti in Chavadi was commenced. The Wada was complete and was inhabited on the Rama-Navami day in 1911 A.D., with due rites and formalities. (3) Then another Wada or palatial mansion was put up by the famous millionaire, Mr. Booty, of Nagpur. Lots of money was spent on this building, but the entire amount was well utilized, as Sai Baba's body is resting in this Wada, which is now called the Samadhi Mandir. The site of this Mandir had formerly a garden, which was watered and looked after by Baba. Three Wadas thus sprang 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, attended to by Sai Baba with the help of Vaman Tatya, 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 Mohdin Tamboli, residence in Masjid, love of Mr. Dengale and other devotees; and other incidents will be described in the next Chapter.

Bow to Shri Sai - Peace be to all