

= Sai Baba of Shirdi =

Sai Baba of Shirdi , also known as Shirdi Sai Baba , was an Indian spiritual master who was regarded by his devotees as a saint , fakir , and satguru , according to their individual proclivities and beliefs . He was revered by both his Hindu and Muslim devotees , and during , as well as after , his life it remained uncertain if he was a Hindu or a Muslim . This , however , was of no consequence to Sai Baba . He stressed the importance of surrender to the true Satguru or Murshid , who , having trod the path to divine consciousness , will lead the disciple through the jungle of spiritual training .

Sai Baba is worshipped by people around the world . He had no love for perishable things and his sole concern was realization of the self . 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 Dwarakamayi to the mosque in which he lived , practised 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 " ) .

= = Background = =

Baba 's dress will be always simple Sai Baba 's real name , his birthplace and date of birth are unknown . When asked about his past , he often gave elusive responses . The name " Sai " was given to him upon his arrival at Shirdi , a town in the West Indian state of Maharashtra . The word " Sai " refers to a religious mendicant . In several Indian and Middle Eastern languages the term " Baba " is an honorific signifying grandfather , father , old man or sir . Thus Sai Baba denotes holy father , saintly father or ( venerable ) poor old man . Some of Sai Baba 's disciples became famous as spiritual figures and saints , such as Mahalsapati , a priest of the Khandoba temple in Shirdi , and Upasni Maharaj . He was revered by other saints , such as Saint Bidkar Maharaj , Saint Gangagir , Saint Janakidas Maharaj , and Sati Godavari Mataji . Sai Baba referred to several saints as ' my brothers ' , especially the disciples of Swami Samartha of Akkalkot .

= = Early years = =

According to the book 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 motionless 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 Mahalsapati , Appa Jogle and Kashinatha . Some considered him mad and threw stones at him . Sai Baba left the village , and little is known about him after that .

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 around 1858 , which suggests a birth year of 1838 .

= = Return to Shirdi = =

In the year 1858 Sai Baba returned to Shirdi . Around this time he adopted his famous style of dress consisting of a knee @-@ length one @-@ piece Kafni robe and a cloth cap . Ramgir Bua , a

devotee , testified that Sai Baba was dressed like an athlete and sported ' long hair flowing down to the end of his spine ' when he arrived in Shirdi , and that he never had his head shaved . It was only after Baba forfeited a wrestling match with one Mohiddin Tamboli that he took up the kafni and cloth cap , articles of typical Sufi clothing . This attire contributed to Baba 's identification as a Muslim fakir and was a reason for initial indifference and hostility against him in a predominantly Hindu village .

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 ( ' Udhi ' ) 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 sacred Hindu texts along with the Qur 'an . 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 .

= = 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 Qur 'an and Hindus to study texts such as the Ramayana , Bhagavad Gita , and Yoga Vasistha . 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 ( Sraddha ) and waiting cheerfully with patience and love ( Saburi ) . He criticised atheism .

In his teachings , Sai Baba emphasised the importance of performing one 's duties without attachment to earthly matters and of being content regardless of the situation . In his personal practice , Sai Baba observed worship procedures belonging to Hinduism and Islam ; he shunned any kind of regular rituals but allowed the practice of namaz , chanting of Al @-@ Fatiha , and Qur 'an readings at Muslim festival times . Occasionally reciting the Al @-@ Fatiha , Baba enjoyed listening to mawlid and qawwali accompanied with the tabla and sarangi twice daily .

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 .

Sai Baba encouraged charity , and stressed the importance of sharing . He said : " Unless there is some relationship or connection , nobody goes anywhere . If any men or creatures come to you , do not discourteously drive them away , but receive them well and treat them with due respect . Shri Hari ( God ) will certainly be pleased if you give water to the thirsty , bread to the hungry , clothes to the naked , and your verandah to strangers for sitting and resting . If anybody wants any money from you and you are not inclined to give , do not give , but do not bark at him like a dog . "

= = Worship 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 first Sai Baba temple is situated at Kudal , Sindhudurg . This temple was built in 1922 . It is believed that Sai Baba gave one Rupee to Dada Madye ji with which he built the temple in Kudal . 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 100 @,@ 000 . Shirdi Sai Baba is especially revered and worshiped in the states of Maharashtra , Odisha , Andhra Pradesh , Karnataka , Tamil Nadu and Gujarat . 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 .

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 .

= = = Notable disciples = = =

Sai Baba left behind no spiritual heirs , appointed no disciples , and did not even provide formal initiation ( diksha ) , despite requests . Some disciples of Sai Baba achieved fame as spiritual figures , such as Upasni Maharaj of Sakori . After Sai Baba died , his devotees offered the daily Aarti to Upasni Maharaj when he paid a visit to Shirdi , two times within 10 years .

= = Claimed miracles = =

Sai Baba 's disciples and devotees claim that he performed many miracles such as bilocation , levitation , mindreading , materialisation , exorcisms , making the river Yamuna , entering a state of Sam?dhi at will , lighting lamps with water , removing his limbs or intestines and sticking them back to his body ( khandana 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 .

On 15 April 2010 , in Wellington 's Lower Hutt Suburb , Wainuiomata in New Zealand , a Sri Lankan Christian Developer was developing a new Subdivision , in his 10 acres of land .

While digging the field , a Digger found a solid object , about 6 to 7 feet under the ground .

He stopped digging immediately and lifted this object out of the ground .

The Developer , on seeing that this solid object was the Statue of some Deity , halted further digging and got the Statue cleaned .

He then called a Hindu Priest to identify the Deity , as he himself was not sure about it .

The Statue roughly 2 feet tall , happened to be of Shirdi Sai Baba in a sitting posture .

Soon , water started coming out from the place where the digger had found Baba 's Statue and slowly it turned into a small pond .

Hence , Baba 's Statue was put on a small wooden pallet and now rests floating in the pond , at the same place .

Also , apparently the Developer has decided to leave this particular spot untouched and re @-@ develop another area .

= = In various religions = =

= = = Hinduism = = =

During Sai Baba 's life , the Hindu saint Anandanath of Yewala declared Sai Baba to be a " spiritual

diamond . " Another saint , Gangagir , also called him a " jewel . " Sri Beedkar Maharaj greatly revered Sai Baba , and in 1873 , when he met him he bestowed the title Jagad guru upon him . Sai Baba was also greatly respected by Vasudevananda Saraswati ( known as Tembye Swami ) . He was also revered by a group of Shaivite yogis , to which he belonged , known as the Nath @-@ Panchayat .

According to B.V. Narasimhaswami , a posthumous follower who was widely praised as Sai Baba 's apostle , many Hindus regarded Sai Baba as a Muslim . This attitude was prevalent up to 1954 even among some of his devotees in Shirdi .

= = = Zoroastrianism = = =

Sai Baba was revered by prominent Zoroastrians such as Nanabhoy Palkhivala and Homi Bhabha , and has been cited as the Zoroastrians ' most popular non @-@ Zoroastrian religious figure .

Meher Baba , who was born into a Zoroastrian family , met Sai Baba once , during World War I , in December 1915 . Meher Baba was a youngster named Merwan Sheriar Irani , when he met Sai Baba for a few minutes during one of Sai Baba 's processions in Shirdi . This event is considered as the most significant in Meher Baba 's life . Shri Sai Satcharita ( Sai Baba 's life story ) , makes no mention of Meher Baba . But in Lord Meher , the life story of Meher Baba , there are numerous references to Sai Baba .

Meher Baba credited his Avataric advent to Upasni , Sai Baba , and three other Perfect Masters : Hazrat Babajan , Hazrat Tajuddin Baba , and Narayan Maharaj . He declared Sai Baba to be a Qutub @-@ e @-@ Irshad ( the highest of the five Qutubs , a " Master of the Universe " in the spiritual hierarchy ) .

= = In culture = =

= = = Sacred art and architecture = = =

There are many Sai Baba temples in India . There are also temples located in countries outside India , including in the United States , Netherlands , Kenya , Benin , Cuba , Canada , Pakistan , Australia , United Kingdom , Germany , Japan . In the mosque in Shirdi , in which Sai Baba lived , there is a life @-@ size portrait of him by Shama Rao Jaykar , an artist from Mumbai . Numerous monuments and statues depicting Sai Baba , which serve a religious function , have been made . One of them , made of marble by a sculptor named Balaji Vasant Talim , is in the Samadhi Mandir in Shirdi where Sai Baba was buried .

= = = Film and television = = =

Sai Baba has been the subject of several feature films in many languages produced by India 's film industry .