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## 8 **Shirdi**

### Tuesday, October 22, 1985.

### *Mahāsamādhī* Celebrations

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#### **Excerpts From My Diary**

8 a.m. Woke up at 5:30 a.m. It is quite chilly here in the early morning. Participated in the solemn procession and in the *abhiṣeka*, the consecration and bathing of Sai Baba's *mūrti*, the marble statue inside the Samādhī Mandir. I took several photos. Despite the huge crowds and long queues, I could feel the people's intense devotion on this special occasion. Remarkably, I haven't seen a single Westerner around. My presence is clearly regarded as something strange or unusual and indeed many Indians look at me with a mix of curiosity and surprise.

Later, I had a short conversation with Baldev Girme reporting information on Abdul Baba which he got from the custodian of Abdul Baba's tomb in Shirdi. Even this little information may turn out to be precious. I offered *udī*, the sacred ash, at the margosa or *nīm* tree where the *samādhī* of Sai Baba's *guru* is supposedly located. Must come here and offer it again next Thursday or Friday evening, before leaving Shirdi (all evils and ailments are said to be cured by burning incense here on Thursdays and Fridays). Today is undoubtedly the holiest day for all Sai Baba devotees.

1 p.m. This morning around 10 I had a great blessing: I was allowed to have Sai Baba's *darshan* in the Samādhī Mandir and to go up to his tomb! It was an incredible honor to be allowed to go up to the *samādhī*, place some garlands on it, and also touch it. A rare grace indeed which was made possible thanks to Appa Saheb Borawke, whom I was permitted to accompany up to the *samādhī* for his daily offering of fresh, beautiful roses. Baldev Girme was also with us. Later, I took some photos of Appa Saheb Borawke and also of Shri Deshpande Saheb, Meher Baba's photographer.

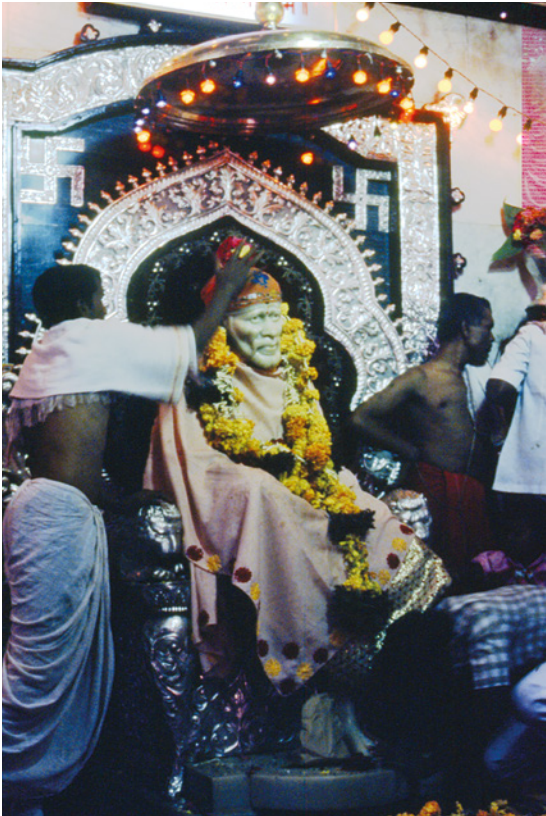
I was able to speak for quite a long time with a trustee of the Sansthān, Prakash V. Karkhanis from Bombay, a chartered accountant who is an acute and brilliant young man. I could not record our conversation, however. We



**Figure 67** The Samādhī Mandir

**Figure 68** The queue of devotees going to the Samādhī Mandir





**Figure 69**  
The queue of devotees going to the Samādhi Mandir

**Figure 70**  
Sai Baba's *murti* in the Samādhi Mandir. A temple priest offers flowers to it while a devotee prostrates himself at its feet





**Figure 71**  
Sai Baba's *murti* in the Samādhī Mandir.  
A woman devotee prostrates at its feet

**Figure 72**  
Sai Baba's tomb in the Samādhī Mandir,  
located just below the *murti*







**Figure 73** Sai Baba's tomb in the Samādhī Mandir, located just below the *mūrti*

**Figure 74** Display of Sai Baba's image and other sacred items in the Samādhī Mandir

**Figure 75** Inside the Samādhī Mandir. Scenes of Sai Baba's life are represented on its sides (upper floor level)

**SHRI SAI BABA SANSTHAN, SHIRDI**

Previously administration of Shri Sai Baba Sansthan was carried out by the Court Receiver under the order of the Bombay City Civil Court, Bombay. Now the Board of management and Executive Officer have been appointed for the same. The Sansthan Administration is now with the Board of Management and Executive Officer with effect from 16 the Aug. 1984.

Their names are as under:

1. Shri P.K. Sawant	Bombay	Chairman
2. Shri T.R. Borawake	Shirdi	Trustee
3. Shri S.B. Darp	Pune	"
4. Shri S.S. Dhanu	Bombay	"
5. Shri S.M. Jadhav	Lonavala	"
6. Shri M.N. Jain	Secunderabad	"
7. Shri K.H. Kakre	Ahmednagar	"
8. Shri Dr. M.K. Kirtikar	Bombay	"
9. Shri P.V. Karkhanis	Bombay	"
10. Shri K.R. Koli	Thane	"
11. Shri V.M. Korhalkar	Kopergaon	"
12. Shri G.B. Kote	Shirdi	"
13. Shri B.V. Khambekar	Kopergaon	"
14. Shri V.B. Kher	Bombay	"
15. Shri N.C. Mody	Bombay	"
16. Shri J.P. Sawe	Bombay	"
17. Shri S.V. Sawant	Bombay	"
18. Shri J.R. Shah	Bombay	"
19. Shri S.R. Shinde	Bombay	"
20. Shri G.T. Shelke	Shirdi	"
21. Miss R.G. Dighe	Bombay	Lady
		Representative
22. Shri V.S. Apte	Bombay	Employee's
		Representative.
		Executive
23. Shri R.D. Banne		Officer.

**Figure 76**  
The chairman and trustees  
of the Shri Sai Baba Sansthān in 1985

discussed in English about Indian culture and the primacy it gives to silence and the unspoken, of the dangers of Westernization as a test for India – according to him, India will pass such test after the sacrifice of a generation – of divine *śakti* that incarnates from age to age, and of Sai Baba and his teachings (a nonverbal instruction, implying surrender or *śaraṇāgati*, pure devotion and religious tolerance, universalism). He emphasized Sai Baba's use of symbols, which were so mysterious, and he mentioned his frequent wraths. With regard to Sai Baba's behavior, he tended to offer a psychological interpretation. He told me that to concentrate on the issue of Sai Baba's origins is futile and absurd. He said that one must rather follow his own conscience and not go after names and forms (*nāma-rūpa*). Moreover, he spoke of sacrifice as that which unites all Indians, despite their many differences due to language, customs, area of provenance, etcetera. He argued that self-sacrifice is innate in Indian culture and that it is only through it that one achieves full joy, *ānanda*.

Had to be careful to what I said. I sensed a certain air of superiority in Prakash Karkhanis' tone and words, a sort of challenge directed to me since in his eyes I represent the evil and ignorant West. But of course I understand his attitude and feelings. Indians have very good reasons for being upset with Westerners. And I know that my position must always be that of an open listener, without prejudice. I must listen with utmost care, keeping my 'windows,' i.e. my ears, wide open. It was a fine conversation on some basic concepts and on how one should approach Indian culture which I think was enriching for both of us.

Mr. Karkhanis also spoke of the Shirdi Sansthān and its need of a trust. He confirmed to me that at present there are twenty-two members plus a Manager or Executive Officer that depend upon the Bombay City Civil Court. The Chairman of the Sansthān is Shri P.K. Sawant from Bombay, whereas the Executive Officer is Shri R.D. Banne. He underlined that there is an interchange and mutual collaboration between the various members and organs of the Sansthān and that the organization has only charitable aims.

Must certainly come back to the Sansthān, also for purchasing old copies of the *Sai Leela* magazine. This afternoon, around 5, I should go see Balaji Pilaji Gurav for another interview. And tomorrow at 6 p.m. I should go visit Appa Saheb Borawke's son at his home.

Baldev Girme reported to me some other anecdotes that Uddhao Madhavrao Deshpande told him about Sai Baba. For instance, when Sai Baba cooked at the *masjid*, he would often thrust his own hand in the boiling pot in order to mix and stir its contents, never using any ladle, and suffered no consequences, i.e. he never burned himself.

This morning I also visited the local Lakṣmī temple which happens to be very close to my hotel. Apparently it was at this spot that Sai Baba cured one Bala Ganpat Shimpi from malarial fever by ordering him to feed a black dog.<sup>1</sup>

Had a good lunch. Unfortunately, I have a lot of mosquito bites especially on my arms. Lots of mosquito come out at night. But for the rest I'm ok. Now I must take a good shower and prepare myself for this afternoon.

6:10 p.m. I interviewed Balaji Pilaji Gurav for the second time. We had a nice conversation, not too long. It's enough for today. This evening at 9 I will again participate in the *pālkhī* procession.

Tomorrow I'll have to wake up very early in order to attend the various functions and the *kākaḍ ārtī*, which starts at 5:15 a.m. In the morning I will try to interview the Swami who is the custodian of the local Mārutī temple, who has been living here for the past fifteen years. Then in the afternoon we shall again try to meet with Homi Baba. At 6 p.m. Baldev Girme will come to pick me up with his car and take me to the home of Appa Saheb Borawke's son.

For what concerns the recording of interviews I think I'm almost done. I've seen all the important people here in Shirdi. Anyway, will try to see if I can arrange some extra meetings. Up until now I have collected about eight, nine hours of recordings, which are a lot. I'm satisfied with the results.

<sup>1</sup> See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita: The Life and Teachings of Shirdi Sai Baba*, 205-6 (ch. 13, vv. 88-97).

**Interviews of the day**

In Shirdi, near to Abdul Baba's tomb, 7:30 a.m.

**Conversation with Shri Baldev Girme, reporting information on Abdul Baba which he got from the custodian of Abdul Baba's *samādhi* in Shirdi.**

Baldev Girme says:

Abdul Baba was a great devotee of Sai Baba. He was a married man. After his marriage, his wife bore a son but before he was born he left home. He travelled, visiting many places in India, holy places. It was Tajuddin Baba who directed him to come to Sai Baba of Shirdi. It was only Tajuddin Baba who told Abdul Baba he should become a disciple of Sai Baba. "He is the Omnipotent", Tajuddin Baba told him, "He is Allāh". Till the end, Abdul Baba was with Sai Baba. With regard to Abdul Baba's life, there are several reports in various books you can read; they are written with sufficient reliability. Abdul Baba took *samādhi* on April 2, 1954.

- Q What was Abdul Baba's first experience with Sai Baba when he first came to Shirdi?
- A Abdul Baba surrendered himself completely to Sai Baba, for about thirty years. During Sai Baba's lifetime, until 1918, Abdul Baba did about thirty years of *sevā* at the feet of Sai Baba.
- Q Thus he was very old when he died?
- A Yes, he was very old when he died. That means that, even after Sai Baba's death, he dedicated himself completely to him, until 1954.
- Q He lived here then?
- A Yes, he lived here.
- Q Was this *samādhi* built soon after his death?
- A Yes, soon after his death. The expense for this was paid by a Parsi lady, her name is Bharucha, and also Mister Appa Saheb Borawke, alias Tukaram Raghujiv Borawke, contributed to it. If you were to ask anybody in Shirdi where Appa Borawke lives, I'm sure all would be able to give you information on him. He is commonly known as Appa. Appa himself spent lots of money, especially for the building of the upper part of the *samādhi*.
- Q Was Abdul Baba a sort of guide or leader for the Muslims resident here, or the ones who came here to visit?
- A Abdul Baba used to read from the Koran, in Sai Baba's presence. But one cannot say that the Muslims alone followed him. For instance, Appa is not a Muslim; Appa is a Hindu but he was also a follower of Abdul Baba.
- Q Could we then say that Abdul Baba was a very close devotee of Sai Baba?
- A Exactly. He was very close to Sai Baba.
- Q And he was a man totally abandoned to him?
- A Yes, yes. He was indeed a man totally abandoned to Sai Baba.
- I Thanks a lot for your information.



In Shirdi, Shri Balaji Pilaji Gurav's house, 5 p.m.



## Second conversation with Shri Balaji Pilaji Gurav, who settled in Shirdi in 1912.

- Q Do you know of any other old devotees of Baba, who knew him when he was alive?
- A There were some others, but they have died recently.
- Q Do you remember any of the names?
- A One was called Nivarki Baba. Then there was Rasane,<sup>2</sup> who died about three months ago.
- Q Was he very old?
- A Yes, very old. He was eighty-five or eighty-seven. I have also seen Rasane Kaka...<sup>3</sup> myself.
- Q But are there anymore alive?
- A No, there aren't others.
- Q Could you tell us a story about Sai Baba? Something you would like to remember and which you did not tell us the last time. I'm not asking you anything specifically... just if you could freely talk about Sai Baba.
- A Once it happened that some villagers from Nandi went to Shegaon to meet with Gajanan Maharaj. Gajanan Maharaj gave them a coconut, telling them to bring it to Sai Baba. Gajanan Maharaj said: "My brother is there, in Shirdi. Bring him this coconut". On the way to Shirdi, however, one of the villagers broke the coconut and ate it. Then, when they arrived in Shirdi, Sai Baba himself immediately asked them before they could open their mouths: "Where is the coconut which my brother sends me?". Only at these words of Baba did the villagers remember what they had done with the coconut. Thus, Baba got angry with them. So, after Baba had asked: "Where is the coconut of my brother?", those pilgrims went to buy another coconut at one of the village stores. Baba, however, said that he would not accept it in lieu of the other. He said: "That coconut was very different from this one". Then Baba remained silent. Thus, Baba gave proof of knowing all the antecedents of Gajanan Maharaj's coconut, showing his *antarjñān*.<sup>4</sup>
- Q So he didn't accept the other coconut?
- T No, he didn't.<sup>5</sup>
- Q Did Sai Baba ever ask you to give him *dakṣiṇā*?
- A Baba would give me, Pilaji Gurav, *dakṣiṇā*.
- Q Ah, so Sai Baba would give you money?
- T Yes, Baba himself would give him money.

Balaji Pilaji:

Daily I received two *āṇās*<sup>6</sup> from Baba. Every day.

<sup>2</sup> Dattatreya Damodar Rasane alias Nana Saheb Rasane, son of Damodar (Anna) Savalram Rasane.

<sup>3</sup> D.D. Rasane's uncle.

<sup>4</sup> Lit. 'inner knowledge', omniscience.

<sup>5</sup> This story call to mind a similar one, in which the orthodox Brahmin Vasudevananda Sarasvati (1854-1914), also known as Tembe Swami, had asked one Pundalikrao to present a coconut to Sai Baba on his behalf; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita: The Life and Teachings of Shirdi Sai Baba*, 844-9 (ch. 51, vv. 125-83).

<sup>6</sup> An *āṇā* (*anna*) was a currency unit used in British India, equal to one sixteenth of a rupee.



**Figure 77** Coin that Sai Baba donated to Balaji Pilaji Gurav and which the latter treasured as a relic

T There were many people who daily received *dakṣiṇā* from Baba: two *āṇās*, four *āṇās*, fifteen rupees, twenty rupees, etcetera.

Balaji Pilaji [showing some coins which he has kept as relics]:  
I have spent all other coins for my necessities. These are the only ones I have left.

Q Did you ever see Baba getting angry at someone?

A Sai Baba got angry and would give punishments if somebody made mistakes.

Q Did this happen often?

A Not often, sometimes.

Q Could you tell me anything about Upasni Maharaj? Did you ever had occasion of speaking to him?

A In 1912, when my family took up residence in Shirdi, that same year Upasni Maharaj also came to Shirdi. In 1912.

Q And what happened?

A Upasni Maharaj was also a devotee of Baba. Like Shyamaji, myself, and others. Kaka Saheb Dixit used to offer free meals to all devotees and pilgrims during the first three days of their presence in the village. For three days, not more. Upasni Maharaj stayed here six months with Baba. So then, one day, Kaka Saheb Dixit asked Shyamaji, who supervised food distribution...

- Q Are you saying that Shyama was the one who decided about distributing the food among the people?  
 T He acted as a kind of supervisor.

Balaji Pilaji continues:

Kaka Saheb Dixit told Upasni Maharaj that the situation was not right. He said: "You have been here for six months now. You may well leave". So he told him.

- Q Do you mean to say that he stayed in Shirdi for six months without ever paying for the food he was given?  
 T Yes. Kaka Saheb Dixit offered this service in those days. He would serve food to devotees.

Balaji Pilaji:

Then Upasni Maharaj went to Baba and said: "Baba it has happened thus, they are not giving me food anymore. What should I do?". Then Baba told him: "Don't worry about this. Wait". From that day Baba sent Upasni Maharaj to the Khaṇḍobā temple, asking him to remain there and live there. Baba told him: "In two, three years you will become like me". So said Sai Baba to Upasni Maharaj.

- Q He meant a great *guru* like him?  
 T Yes, so did Sai Baba say to Upasni Maharaj.  
 Q And what about the food problem, how did he manage to get his food?  
 A When Upasni Maharaj went to Khaṇḍobā's temple, he left all that he had, all his possessions.  
 Q What do you mean?  
 T It means that all that he had, that is, clothes, possessions, etcetera, was abandoned by him.  
 Q Did he remain naked?  
 T Yes, naked.

Balaji Pilaji:

At Khaṇḍobā's temple someone said: "This fellow has gone crazy, wandering around naked". People told him: "This is not good: put on something".

- Q What about the food, how did he manage if nobody gave him any?  
 A There were two ladies there, Sardabai and Durgabai. They brought food to Upasni Baba.  
 Q Thus these two ladies would bring food to Upasni Maharaj at Khaṇḍobā's temple. Could you please repeat their names?  
 A Sardabai and Durgabai.  
 Q Did Sai Baba ever speak in parables, did he ever tell stories?  
 A Baba would tell stories to people on various subjects. Baba would always speak in Marāṭhī or in Hindī. He would use both these languages, as others did. He would tell stories daily.  
 I Thus he would narrate stories daily...  
 T Yes, yes.  
 Q Could you tell me one?  
 A No. I have forgot.



- Q Did you ever see Baba practicing yogic exercises? Did he practice any *āsanas*<sup>7</sup> here in Shirdi?
- A I have already told you in the first interview... Of that *mahātmā* who came here from Haridvar and was staying at the Māruti temple and who discussed *yoga* with Sai Baba, etcetera.<sup>8</sup>
- Q Is it true that Sai Baba would often sit in this posture inside the Dvārakāmāi [I imitate his cross-legged posture]?
- A Not always. Only sometimes he would sit like that.
- I Only sometimes...
- T Yes.
- I I ask this question since Baba, in most pictures, is portrayed in this posture.
- T Yes, but only at times he would sit that way.
- Q Was he used to keep other particular postures?
- T No. He would sit in an ordinary manner. Just like us now.
- Q Perhaps in *padmāsana*?<sup>9</sup>
- T No, no, nothing... Like us now, cross-legged.

Balaji Pilaji:

Baba did not keep any particular *āsana*. He would not do *āsanas* in front of people nor at other times.

- Q Thus, he wouldn't always sit in that particular posture?
- T No. Just sometimes, when he sat on the stone which is in the *masjid*: then only would he sit that way.
- Q Could you tell me something about Sri Narayan Baba?
- A Sri Narayan Baba has been coming to Shirdi since 1960. He behaves like all other devotees... He comes and goes.
- Q Thus he is like any ordinary devotee?
- A I can tell you about Ram Baba. He is about one hundred and thirty years old, but although he is so old he wasn't here during Sai Baba's times.
- Q Oh, so he wasn't here during Sai Baba's lifetime?
- T No, so says Pilaji Gurav. In subsequent years, however, he was always coming and going from Shirdi.
- Q Ram Baba used to come and go from Shirdi after Sai Baba's *samādhi*?
- T Yes, right.
- Q Not before?
- T No.

Balaji Pilaji:

Not before. Only after Baba's *samādhi*.

I It's strange...

T Yes.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Yogic postures.

<sup>8</sup> On Sai Baba and yoga, see Rigopoulos, "Sāi Bābā of Śirḍī and Yoga Powers".

<sup>9</sup> Lit. 'lotus posture'. Sitting with the legs crossed and the heels placed on the thighs.

<sup>10</sup> In fact, Ram Baba was in Shirdi at least once in Sai Baba's times, i.e. on February 22, 1914, as narrated in chapter 23 of the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (vv. 12-20); Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita: The Life and Teachings of Shirdi Sai Baba*, 373.

Q Have you ever heard of Basheer Baba and Meher Baba?

A I have seen Basheer Baba only once here in Shirdi.

Q Only once?

T Only once. He stayed here for about ten days. In Shirdi. He also did some *yajñas*.

Balaji Pilaji:

Basheer Baba said he was about fifty-five years old when he came to Shirdi. After that time, I haven't seen him anymore.

Q Do you consider Basheer Baba also as just an ordinary devotee?

T Yes, he is just a devotee. Now he is dead, so we have heard.

Balaji Pilaji:

One Swami from Ganeshpuri, Muktananda by name, also used to come here to Shirdi. But not at the time when Baba was alive. He came after Baba's *samādhī*.

Q Did he visit Shirdi often?

T Yes, often. He would then go back to Ganeshpuri.

I Thank you.

