# 2 G.S. Khaparde's First Visit to Shirdi
## 5-12 December 1910

In December 1910, Khaparde came to Shirdi for the first time together with his son Balkrishna: he was 56 years old and his son was 28. He had been in Britain for two years, i.e., from September 1908 to September 1910, and had returned home to Amravati only on 5 November after having gone to visit Tilak in the Mandalay jail in Burma. Politically, it was a difficult time for him, his destiny being tied to that of his leader. We know that while in London he had sent a memorial to Lord John Morley (1838-1923),[1] the then Secretary of State for India, and that he even tried to invoke the mercy of King George V (1865-1936), but it had all been in vain.[2] In a diary entry dated 25 May 1910, he wrote:

> She [= Mrs. Grant] knows one Mr. Hood who is high in favor with Her Majesty Queen Mary, and would through him and her have conveyed to His Majesty King George, some measures to allay the unrest in India. The thing looks problematical but the desire as being good need not be checked. We told her that to restore peace and good will, all repressive measures passed in India within the last two or three years would have to be repealed, all political prisoners would have to be released and a general political amnesty given, with liberty for us to carry on all the peaceful activities that we did in 1906, and then things will gradually work round to the normal state. She said she would try her best in the next week and said she would mention Tilak by name for being released.[3]

**1** Together with Lord Minto he was responsible for the Morley-Minto Reforms. These reforms expanded central and provincial legislatures, made non-official majorities in provincial legislatures possible, and provided for separate electorates to give minority communities additional weight.

**2** The first appeal to the Crown had been submitted in February 1910 by Edward Dalgado, Tilak's London solicitor.

**3** Kunte, *Source Material*, 387.


DOI 10.30687/979-12-5742-062-8/004

All juridical and diplomatic efforts to free the 'Lokmānya' having failed, his supporters had to face quite difficult times. With regard to Khaparde, the British historian of colonial India Gordon Johnson writes:

> Khaparde […] was subjected to continual police surveillance and petty harassment. Government officials were forbidden to visit him, and, while he was in London conducting Tilak's appeal before the Privy Council, the government deprived him of his seats on the municipality and district board in Amraoti on technical trivialities.[4]

The possibility that Khaparde could be arrested was concrete, while the hypothesis that what brought him to Shirdi was to avoid such risk appears unjustified. To be sure, he was under strict surveillance by the British, who in this period increased their monitoring of his movements, yet the reason that led Khaparde to Shirdi was a genuinely religious one, i.e., it was not merely opportunistic or meant to reassure the British of his innocuousness.[5] With reference to his being constantly surveilled by the British, Khaparde in his diary entries writes:

> It would appear as if detective activity has revived for some reason in London. It was there always but would appear to have increased now. (London, 1 March 1910)
>
> It was a detective asking Mrs. Grave what I was doing, how I was spending my time, who came to see me and things of that kind. […] He wished to know if there was anything hidden or secret about me. (London, 16 March 1910)
>
> Mrs. Grave noticed a man watching our house at a little distance. When he thought we noticed him he went away. (London, 29 March 1910)
>
> [U]nder a warrant our Amravati house was searched and many of my letters were taken away. (London, 2 April 1910)
>
> The detective department appears to have become active again. A man was watching me today. (London, 14 July 1910)
>
> A police spy was detected, and asked to withdraw from the house. (Rangoon, 16 October 1910)
>
> The detectives watched the train at Calcutta, at intermediate stations and at Nagpur. Now they have established a party of three at the gate of the bungalow. (Nagpur, 29 October 1910)
>
> Azizuddin, the nephew of the late Hisamuddin of Hyderabad Deccan,

**4** Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism*, 183.

**5** Given Khaparde's courage and strong personality, the idea that he "visited Sai Baba because he was apprehensive about the diabolic intentions of the British Government, given the suspicious activities of the intelligence agents around him" is unconvincing; see Satpathy, *New Findings*, 45. Satpathy follows Narasimhaswami in maintaining that Khaparde retreated to Shirdi in order to escape from the claws of the British; see also McLain, *The Afterlife of Sai Baba*, 97.

> came apparently to see me. His talk was incoherent and I found out that he is working as a police spy. (Nagpur, 30 October 1910)
>
> There was of course a detective watching closely. (Poona, 29 November 1910)[6]

What Khaparde didn't know is that Reginald Henry Craddock (1864-1937), Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces, already on 19 March 1909 – while Khaparde was in England – had sent to Sir Harold Stuart, the then Home Secretary, a confidential report.[7] In this dispatch, basing himself on Khaparde's seditious activities starting in 1905, Craddock proposed the deportation of both him and B.S. Munje to the tropical island of Saint Helena in the South Atlantic Ocean, under Regulation III of 1818. This account was then sent to H.A. Damson, Member of the Council of the Governor-General, and finally to Viceroy Lord Minto (1845-1914) who, in a letter dated 23 April 1909 observed that "it would be altogether inopportune to raise the question of deportation under present conditions".[8] The "present conditions" were related to Tilak having been imprisoned in Burma ten months earlier, which evidently made the deportation of his aides Khaparde and Munje unnecessary, i.e., "altogether inopportune". As it has been observed:

> But the Government were noting that the sensation created in the public mind by the trial of Lokamanya was itself a powerful impetus to the demand for Indian Independence and, therefore, if possible, they should avoid sensational trials. […] [T]he foreign Government had more advantage to gain by not ordering more prosecutions of leaders which would keep up political excitement in the country.[9]

Nonetheless, though the proposal of deportation was rejected by the Viceroy, the threat of Khaparde's arrest was kept alive.

Even economically, Khaparde had to face various hardships since his activity as a pleader was substantially slowed down due to his being far away from India for more than two years. The decline of his business was destined to get even worse in the coming years. Thus it is not surprising that when in the summer of 1910 Bipin Chandra Pal, who was very hard pressed for money, asked him for a loan, Khaparde could not help him. On 19 August 1910, he wrote:

> Saw Bipin Babu […]. His pecuniary difficulties are pressing and I feel very sorry for him, the more so that I am not in a position to help. I felt depressed again.[10]

**6** Kunte, *Source Material*, 383-6, 388, 390. Since 1978, the official spelling of Poona has been Pune.

**7** The report is under the name of Charles R. Cleveland, Inspector-General of Police Central Provinces on the Disloyal Party in Nagpur; see "Stuart to Craddock, 17 May 1909, Notes, Home Political Deposit, June 1909, 3, National Archives of India", quoted in Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism*, 183. This report was recently analyzed by Satpathy, *New Findings*, 45-8, 174-6.

**8** Satpathy, *New Findings*, 175.

**9** The full text can be read at `http://saiamrithadhara.com/mahabhakthas/dadasaheb_khaparde.html`, 6.

**10** Kunte, *Source Material*, 388. On Bipin Candra Pal's economic difficulties, see Khaparde, *Śrī Dādāsāheb Khāparḍe*, 424-6.

Moreover, the recent deaths of his *guru* Gajanan Maharaj and of his mother in September 1910, while he was still abroad, were a severe blow to cope with. For all these reasons, Khaparde's state of mind when he left for Shirdi in early December 1910 – just a month after he had returned to Amravati – was certainly not at its highest, being filled with worries. On the other hand, he must have looked forward to meeting Sai Baba and seeking his blessings, the latter's popularity as a saint and miracle worker being already quite widespread throughout the region. What is more important, Gajanan Maharaj had expressly directed him to Sai Baba, telling him that after his demise he should look at the Shirdi *faqīr* as his spiritual guide. Given the difficult time he was facing, he must have felt relieved at the possibility of having Sai Baba's *darśan* and finding solace at his feet, if only for a few days.

Khaparde and his eldest son left from Bombay by train the night of 4 December, at 10:15 PM, and reached Manmad around 9 AM of the following day. At Manmad's railway station they had to wait a few hours, until nearly 1 PM, before catching a train for Kopargaon, the closest place to the village of Shirdi which is located at a distance of about 15 km north of Kopargaon.

As to what Shirdi looked like at the time, we have the testimony of Balkrishna Vishwanath Dev, a Mamlatdar, i.e., a land revenue officer, who first came to visit Sai Baba in 1910.[11] In an article that appeared in *Shri Sai Leela* in 1932, he writes:

> [A]t that time the village had about 400 houses big and small, two wells, a Marāṭhī school up to the seventh standard as well as a Marāṭhī Mission School, two *panmala*s [= betel-leaf plantations], two orchards, one flower garden, nine temples, two *masjid*s, one *dharamshala* [= public resthouse], one sugar mill, one flour mill, and one water mill.
>
> [T]he total population was 2,568, the Hindus being divided into the following castes: Brahmins, Marwadis, Marathas, Dhangars (shepherds), Malis (growers of fruits and vegetables), Sonars (goldsmiths), Sutars (carpenters), Lohars (blacksmiths), Kumbhars (potters), Parits (washermen), Mahars, Mangs, Chamars (leather workers and tanners), Kolis, Bhils (scheduled tribes), Guravs and Vadars.[12]

But let us now 'give the floor' to Khaparde and focus on his *Shirdi Diary*.[13] The portions of the text that concern Khaparde's and the devotees' interactions with Sai Baba and mention the latter's words and deeds are italicized. In addition, the saint's tales and the utterances of his purported *antarajñāna* – through which he revealed details of his own past lives and those of others – are highlighted in bold. For ease of reading, I have also introduced paragraph breaks into Khaparde's diary entries where appropriate; these divisions are editorial and do not generally correspond to

**11** On B.V. Dev, see Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 261-7.

**12** Cited in Kamath, Kher, *Sai Baba of Shirdi*, 85.

**13** Unless otherwise specified, all entries and quotes are taken from the following source: *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. Ganesh Shrikrishna Khaparde, Advocate, Umraoti*, `http://saiamrithadhara.com/docs/G.%20S.%20Khaparde%20Diary.pdf.pdf`. This source has been preferred because, despite its title, it is not limited to Khaparde's stays in Shirdi, unlike the standard edition published by the Sri Sai Baba Sansthan, but also includes entries written elsewhere that contain references to Shirdi and Sai Baba.

paragraphing in the original manuscript, in which Khaparde usually wrote continuously.

> Shirdi, Monday 5 December 1910
>
> [...] We reached Kopargaon[14] station about 2 PM and hired two conveyances, one for things and the other for ourselves to travel in. Bhaskar Rao assisted us with Tongas and gave us guavas to eat at his house and accompanied us to Shirdi,[15] which we reached about 4 PM. We put up in the Wada built for the convenience of people by Mr. Chandkar.[16] Madhavrao Deshpande[17] was very obliging and helped us and treated us like guests. There are in the Wada Tatyasaheb Nulkar with his family, Bapusaheb Jog[18] and Babasaheb Sahasrabuddhe. *We all went to see Sayin*[19] *Maharaj soon after our arrival. He was in the Masjid. After salutation I and my son offered the fruits brought by us and gave some money at his request. The Sayin Saheb then said that he has not been well for the past two years and more, that he used to eat only barley cake and take a little water. He showed his foot and pointed to a small sore, said it was the stringworm* [= guinea worm], *that it was extracted but the string snapped and then it*

**14** Today, by car, it takes less than twenty minutes to reach Shirdi from Kopargaon. The sacred river Godavari, the Ganges of Maharashtra, passes through Kopargaon.

**15** In the autograph diary, Khaparde spells the place-name variously as 'Sherdi', 'Sheradi', and 'Shiradi', rather than 'Shirdi', the form now standard in English and used throughout the present volume.

**16** This is likely a misspelling of Chandorkar. Prompted by Sai Baba himself, it was the first visitor's lodge. It was actually built by Rao Bahadur Hari Vinayak Sathe (b. 1855) between 1906 and 1908; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 67-8, 70 (chap. 4, vv. 139-42, 168-9); Satpathy, *New Findings*, 77-82. A *vāḍā* is an area of residence, often by caste, with one or more central open courtyards. On the prominent figure of Rao Bahadur Hari Vinayak Sathe, who was the Deputy Collector of the local District, see Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 101-4; Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 247-51; Pradhan, *Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi*, 44-5.

**17** Also known as Shyama/Shama, this Brahmin villager of Shirdi was among the most intimate devotees of Sai Baba and often acted as a personal secretary to him and as an intermediary between him and the devotees. He and his ancestors came from Nimon, a village a few miles away from Shirdi. He used to be a school teacher in a room next door to the local mosque where Sai Baba lived, and his interest in the saint was first kindled there. On Madhavrao Deshpande, see Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 193-6; Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 221, 230-1, 355; Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 104-5; Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 149-62; Rigopoulos, *Oral Testimonies on Sai Baba*, 31-8, 158-62, 183-4; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCYiz_2kiXA.

**18** His actual name was Sakharam Hari (ca. 1856-1926). He was a learned orthodox Brahmin, proficient in Sanskrit, who had worked as a supervisor for the government. For information on this devotee whom Sai Baba loved dearly, see Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 67-71, 124-5; Shepherd, *Faqir of Shirdi*, 82-3, 152. The *Shri Sai Satcharita* reports an instruction of Sai Baba to him; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 733-4 (chap. 44, vv. 136-46). His tomb is in Sakori, a few miles away from Shirdi, where, having become a renouncer (*saṃnyāsin*), he spent the final years of his life at the *ashram* of Upasani Maharaj.

**19** Khaparde writes Sayin in order to stress that the word must be nasalized. The term *sāī*, with nasalization of the *ī*, is derived from Persian/Urdu *sāĩ̃/sāĩṅ* and means 'holy one'. It is commonly applied to Muslim wandering ascetics.

> *reappeared and so on.*[20] *He said he heard that it would not be well with him till he went to his native town. He said he kept it in view but that was all, he cared more for his people than even for his own life. He said he found no rest as people troubled him. It could not be helped. Then he told us to withdraw which we did.*
> *Towards evening he passed by the Wada,*[21] *and we went and saluted him.* I and Madhavrao Deshpande were together. After we saluted, *he said "Go to the Wada and sit quiet".* So I and Madhavrao returned. We all sat talking. They have many miracles to relate.
> I, Baba [= Babasaheb, Khaparde's son Balkrishna] and Babasaheb Sahasrabuddhe had something to eat at night and, after I returned to bed, a strange thing happened. The wife of Das Ganu who has written the Arvachim Sant Lilamrit[22] and is known as Tai came and lay down by my side. I do not know how long she lay like that. When I woke up I found her and was very much surprised. I requested her to go and from what she said I made out that she was insane. So I woke up Madhavrao Deshpande who took her to another part and told her to sleep there on pain of being beaten.

The money that Khaparde and his son gave at the saint's request is the so-called *dakṣiṇā*, i.e., the offering of a 'sacrificial fee'. Sai Baba assured his devotees that whomever he asked for *dakṣiṇā* would be blessed with a much more abundant grace from him.[23] Apparently, the saint had inaugurated his peculiar habit of requesting money in 1908. Unlike most renouncers who view money as related to corruption and impurity,[24] he never feared any contamination from the rupees he gathered.[25]

**20** The *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 34, vv. 48-90) narrates that Sai Baba once cured a devotee, Doctor Pillai, of a similar ailment – namely guinea worm or dracunculiasis; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 558-62. Sai Baba said that a crow would come and peck at his abscesses. It so happened that the 'crow' Abdul, a close disciple of the saint, inadvertently stepped on the leg of Doctor Pillai causing the rupture of the abscesses which led to his healing.

**21** The lodging for visitors built by devotee Rao Bahadur Hari Vinayak Sathe.

**22** On Das Ganu's works with particular reference to Sai Baba's life and deeds, see Rigopoulos, "Connections and Correspondences", 129 fn. 19, 133 fn. 51.

**23** Sai Baba promised a higher reward to those who offered *dakṣiṇā*. Once, he pointed out: "If I take one rupee of *dakshina* from anyone, I have to return it to him tenfold. I never take anything gratis"; Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 149. See also Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 551 (chap. 33, v. 228), 580 (chap. 35, v. 129); Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 97.

**24** One is reminded of saint Ramakrishna's attitude: he had a horror of money to such an extent that he found it repulsive even to be close to it. It is reported that once his disciple Narendra – the future Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) – placed a coin under his mattress. When Ramakrishna sat on it, he began to experience a stinging pain. An attendant examined the bed, and the presence of the rupee was disclosed. Narendra said he did it to test his master's renunciation of wealth. Apparently, Ramakrishna was glad that his disciple had tested him; see *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, 348-9.

**25** Sometimes, Sai Baba performed a kind of ritual by rubbing coins. We read: "He would take a coin and holding it with His thumb, index and middle fingers, rub it. While doing so, He would say the name of the devotee who had offered the coin as well as '*Thu kutha hai, thu gadha hai, thu jalja, thu marja, thu sathyanash hoja* (you are a dog, you are a donkey, may you get burned, may you die, may you be destroyed)'. After scolding seriously, He would put the coin back into the bag. This process continued with each coin. By the time I arrived, only three coins were left. One was Abdullah's, the other Lakshmi's and the last was mine. He took out the coin, called out my name 'Gori' and started scolding. Then He put it back into the bag" (Peddabottu, *Autobiography*, 119). Sai Baba's free interaction with money calls to mind the similar behavior of Guṇḍam Rāüḷ (d. 1287-88), one of the five incarnations (*pañcakṛṣṇas*) of the supreme deity Parameśvar according to the unorthodox Marāṭhī sect of the Mahānubhāvs; see Feldhaus, *Deeds of God in Ṛddhipur*, 63,

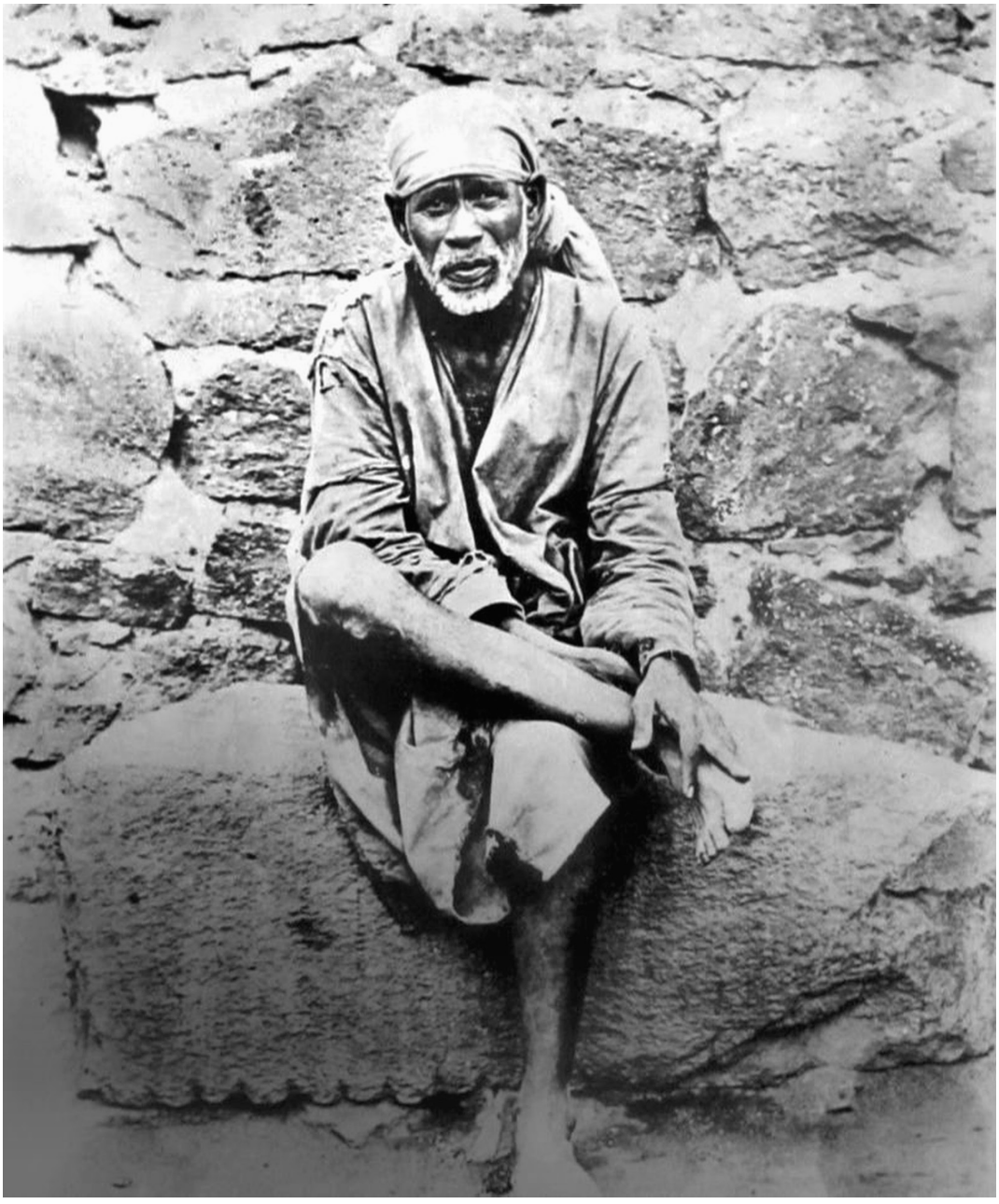


**Figure 11** The famous photograph of Sai Baba seated on a stone in the mosque courtyard, tentatively dated to January or February 1909

Whatever he got during the day he would give away by redistributing it in the evening. In the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 29, vv. 29-30) we read:

> Thus every day, he would give two rupees to her [= Amani, a little girl], six rupees to Jamali [= Amani's mother], five to Dada Kelkar[26] and two each to Bhagya and Sundari. Ten to fifteen rupees would be given regularly to Tatya [= Tatya Kote Patil], fifteen to fifty would go to Fakir Baba [= Bade Baba], and eight rupees to the poor and needy.[27]

The idea is that he asked for *dakṣiṇā* in order to teach the lesson that the secret of life lies in giving.[28] As he used to say: "Wealth is beneficial to the wealthy only in so far as it is spent on *dharma* and in charity. For, ethical conduct and charity alone make for true knowledge".[29] Occasionally, he would advise the person to whom he gave the money to keep it in a safe place and even to perform *pūjā* to it.[30]

It is noteworthy that he often wished to convey a spiritual teaching through the symbolism of the number of *ānā*s (a former currency unit) or rupees he asked for.[31] For example, when he requested two coins, he intended that his devotee should offer him the couplet of *niṣṭhā* and *saburī*, faith and patience.[32] Sometimes his demand of *dakṣiṇā* was motivated by karmic reasons, namely, because of an unfulfilled vow or in order to repay a debt. In time, many people became eager to voluntarily offer money to

79, 158. Sai Baba's habit of playing with money, i.e., with coins, is reflected in one of the Hindī tales of Pāṇḍey Becan Śarmā 'Ugra' (1900-1967), *Khudārām*, in which the protagonist closely resembles Sai Baba; see Caracchi, *Racconti hindī del Novecento*, 128-43.

**26** Ganesh D. Kelkar was an orthodox Brahmin and the father-in-law of Rao Bahadur Hari Vinayak Sathe. He was called 'Dada' by all, in deference to his advanced age. To put him to the test, Sai Baba once asked him to get some mutton for him to eat; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 630-4 (chap. 38, vv. 53-101).

**27** Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 473. According to devotee Bappaji Ratnaparkhi, Sai Baba "would distribute about five hundred rupees daily. He used to give Bayaji ten rupees, from whom he had to purchase wood for Dhuni Maa. Ramachandra Dada got fifteen rupees for sugarcane. Often Baba would say '*Sab paise ke Bhai. Apna koi nahi*' [Roughly translated – 'Everyone belongs to wealth. We belong to no one']"; Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 64. See also Satpathy, *New Findings*, 58-9.

**28** With reference to the first and foremost duty of *annadān*, i.e., feeding people, see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 627-8 (chap. 38, vv. 12-23).

**29** Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 580 (chap. 35, v. 132).

**30** The money having been sanctified by his touch; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 425 (chap. 26, v. 90), 484-5 (chap. 29, vv. 161-72), 486 (chap. 29, v. 189); Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 137; Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 168. On money and coinage in colonial India, see Garg, *The Raj and the Rajas*.

**31** The symbolic relevance of money/coins is widely attested to even in Byzantine and Western culture; see Lucchelli, "Da Afrodite alla croce", 148-9; Travaini, *Valori delle monete*.

**32** See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 303-4 (chap. 19, vv. 49-58), 424 (chap. 26, v. 83), 609 (chap. 37, vv. 60-1), 785 (chap. 48, v. 45); Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 137. Patience or *ṣabr* is one of the virtues most often cited in the *Quran*, and in Sufism it is described as a fundamental step along the path. It is understood as an active effort of self-discipline on the adept's part, which leads him/her to acquire self-control when faced with the hardships of life; see Zilio-Grandi, *Virtues*, 13-24. As the French Jesuit priest Claude La Colombière (1641-1682) said: "Patience moderates the recklessness of these three parts: it binds the tongue with silence, it composes the face with tranquility, and it calms the heart with softness". On Sai Baba's *saburī*, see Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 287-9.

him. He did not accept money from everybody, however, but only from selected persons.[33]

I think that the "native town" is to be interpreted as Allāh's abode and refers to Sai Baba's exiting the world and reuniting with the almighty God, leaving the body and this *saṃsāra* which is inevitably fraught with suffering and pain.[34] Out of compassion, he delays his exit from this world, i.e., he only "keeps it in view", given that his mission is to take care of his devotees, who are more important and dear to him than his own life.[35] Even if people trouble him with all sorts of worldly requests and give him no rest, he is determined to continue guiding and protecting them, though he knows that he will not be well, physically as well as spiritually, until he reunites with Allāh.[36]

Sai Baba was advanced in age and his health conditions were precarious since he suffered from various ailments such as asthma and intestinal troubles. It should be noted, however, that the sources tell us that he would often talk in the first person about his afflictions when he actually referred to the afflictions of someone else who was present at the *masjid*, thus giving proof of his *antarajñāna* or intuitive knowledge. By the same token, he would speak of something that had happened to one who was present at the mosque by relating it to a different person, just as he would tell someone a story that was especially intended for somebody else in the audience. In the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 48, vv. 113-18) we read:

> And, as usual, Baba began to tell, in detail, about his own affliction, very lovingly, to a third person who was present there. In truth, it was the story of the lady, which should have been narrated to her. But when he began relating it to a third person, in her presence, that lady heard it with rapt attention. "My hands, stomach, waist, all have been aching severely for many days. I am tired, trying out medicines. The ailment just does not go. I am really exhausted taking so many medicines, but none has been effective. And I am surprised that now, it has suddenly

**33** On the *faqīr*'s requests of *dakṣiṇā*, see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 224-30 (chap. 14, vv. 90-156). Herein, the author links Sai Baba's requests to the three *da*-s of *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 5.2, i.e., *dāmyata datta dayadhvam* 'restrain yourself, give, be compassionate'. The fact that an ascetic asked for money, however, was perceived by many as a scandal; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 569-70 (chap. 35, vv. 6-9). In 1915, a lady told a devotee who was travelling to Shirdi: "Why are you going there? Baba extracts huge amounts of money as *dakshina*, and is it right for a *sadhu* to have large amounts of money with him?"; Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 58-9. On the saint's habit of requesting *dakṣiṇā*, see also Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 201-7; Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 144-9, 180, 184-5, 209, 222, 228-30.

**34** Sai Baba pointed out that he was wholly detached from his body, even when it was in pain. Once, when his hand was badly burnt, he said: "Get some good cow dung cakes, about a thousand or two thousand, then ignite them. When they are burning brightly put this body over it (Baba pointed to his body while he said this). Then stand beside it to watch the fun. And see this body burn"; Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 124. See also Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 18, 264.

**35** The sources report that Sai Baba even gave his hair or loose teeth to devotees, pulling them out from his head and mouth, asking to keep them safely: devotees would make talismans of his hair and teeth and worship them as precious relics; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 552 (chap. 33, v. 232); Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 82; Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 88-90. A similar behavior is reported of the 13th-century Maharashtrian ascetic Guṇḍam Rāüḷ; see Feldhaus, *Deeds of God in Ṛddhipur*, 109, 112.

**36** Regarding Sai Baba's health, the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 28, v. 88) states that one night in 1910 "Baba had a fit of coughing, which caused him great distress and agitation"; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 458.

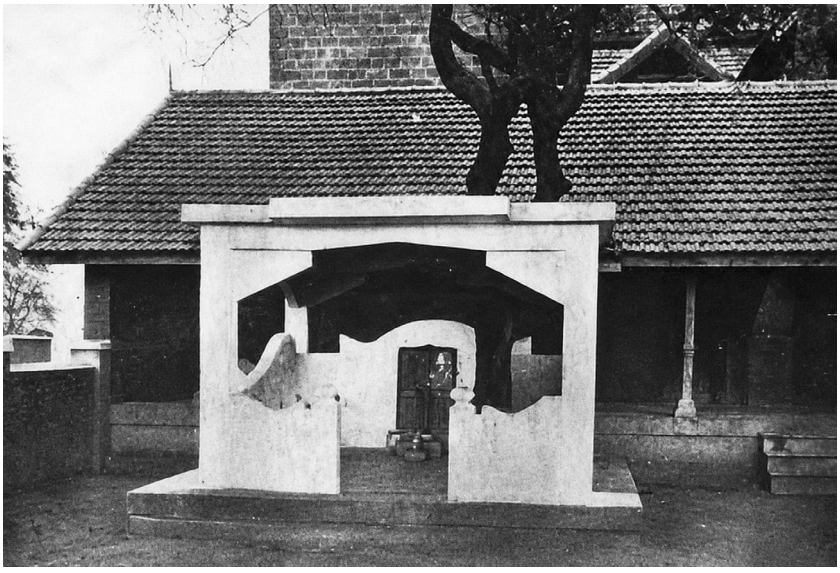


**Figure 12** The Sathe *vāḍā* with the *gurusthān* in the foreground

> disappeared". Such was her story, told to a third person, without even mentioning the lady's name. It was all her own story and that was her connection with it. Later on, at the end of a month or two, when the affliction that Baba had described as his own, was cured, her experience convinced her of its truth.[37]

Therefore, although his pointing to the guinea worm in his foot makes it likely,[38] we cannot be certain that the *faqīr* was referring to his own physical health. Moreover, it should be remembered that even his various illnesses were commonly interpreted to be not his own but those of his devotees, which he had taken upon himself in order to relieve them from their sufferings.

Sai Baba's words of "going to the Wada and sit quiet" imply more than just taking a rest. Especially since this was Khaparde's first *darśan*,[39] the *faqīr* instructed him to find a quiet place where he could still the mind, so as to absorb his powerful vibrations and be spiritually regenerated.

However, perhaps due to the excitement of the moment, Khaparde appears to have been unable to sit quiet: instead, he "sat talking" with all the other people, listening to the many stories of Sai Baba's miracles. It must be pointed out that on occasion the saint would recommend his devotees to sit quietly and simply 'do nothing' (*uge muge*). For instance, in 1912 he

**37** Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 790. See also *ibid.*, 791-2 (chap. 48, vv. 131-8).

**38** Significantly, in the famous photograph of Sai Baba seated cross-legged on a stone boulder – possibly dating to January or February 1909 – a visible scar is discernible on the saint's right leg; see Bhattacharya, *The Divine Resurrection*, 1: 63-4.

**39** On the saint's *darśan*, see Elison, "Sai Baba of Bombay", 151-87.

told his disciple Upasani: "Sit quiet, *Uge Muge*. I will do the needful. I will take you to the end".[40]

> Shirdi, Tuesday 6 December 1910
>
> In the morning, the poor woman Tai was much discussed and they blamed her. I feel pity for her insanity. I had a walk, and after bath *we all saw Sayin Maharaj going out with an embroidered big umbrella held over his head.* Later on we went to Masjid. *Sayin Maharaj was talking. He said speaking to himself [that] there is no use being threatened. It does no good. Why should we threaten? There are very high officers of God. They are very powerful. The same thing was repeated very often. He appeared somewhat excited. Then he got up, distributed the food accumulated there, and after giving udi-ashes requested us to withdraw.* We did so.
> The midday meal was not served till nearly half-past two in the afternoon. After it we sat talking and *saw Sayin Maharaj in the evening when he came out for a walk*. Later on we went to the Chavadi where Sayin Maharaj sleeps tonight.[41] *He was accompanied by the Umbrella of State, silver stick, chavaris* [= ceremonial whisks] *and fans, etc.* The place was tastefully lighted. The lady who is known as Radhakrishna[42] came out with lights. She is related to Babasaheb Deshpande of Ahmednagar. I saw her from a distance. Madhavrao Deshpande said he would be away tomorrow and return the day after. *He asked for and obtained Sayin Maharaj's permission to go.*

**40** Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 4. See also Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 2: 237, 251.

**41** According to the sources, however, Sai Baba never really slept at night but practiced the constant recollection of Allāh. The *cāvaḍī* was the rural assembly hall where the *faqīr* used to stay on alternate nights starting from December 1909. According to Dabholkar "it was ancient (literally from the time of Malik Amber, Dewan of Ahmednagar, from 1597) and was quite worn out and decayed, from above and from below. Chameleons, lizards, scorpions and snakes lived here, freely"; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 360 (chap. 22, v. 118). On the *cāvaḍī*, see Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 47-57.

**42** Also known as Radhakrishna Mai, Bai or Ayi (1882-1916), her original name was Sundari Bai Kshirsagar. She settled in Shirdi in 1909 and died in November 1916 at the young age of 34; see Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 51, 89-92, 127-8; Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 218-20. See also Pradhan, *Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi*, 46, 48; Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 35-41; Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 11-20. It is reported that during her stay in Shirdi she began the transformation of the rural aspect of the village into an urban one since it was she who introduced the *cāvaḍī* procession and *palkhī* procession with umbrella, whisks, fans, flags, etc., overcoming Sai Baba's resistance. And it was she who introduced the performance of the *śej ārtī* and *kākaḍ ārtī* at the *cāvaḍī*. Being a devotee of lord Viṭṭhal of Pandharpur – the major pilgrimage site of the Marāṭhī cultural area – she wanted Sai Baba to have all the grandeur of Viṭṭhal and "with her effort, Baba's *fakiri* was turned into a *rajya yog* (royal appearance)"; Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 40. Though a Brahmin by caste, she would get up early in the morning and, broom in hand, sweep all the roads that Sai Baba trod on; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 584 (chap. 35, vv. 177-80).

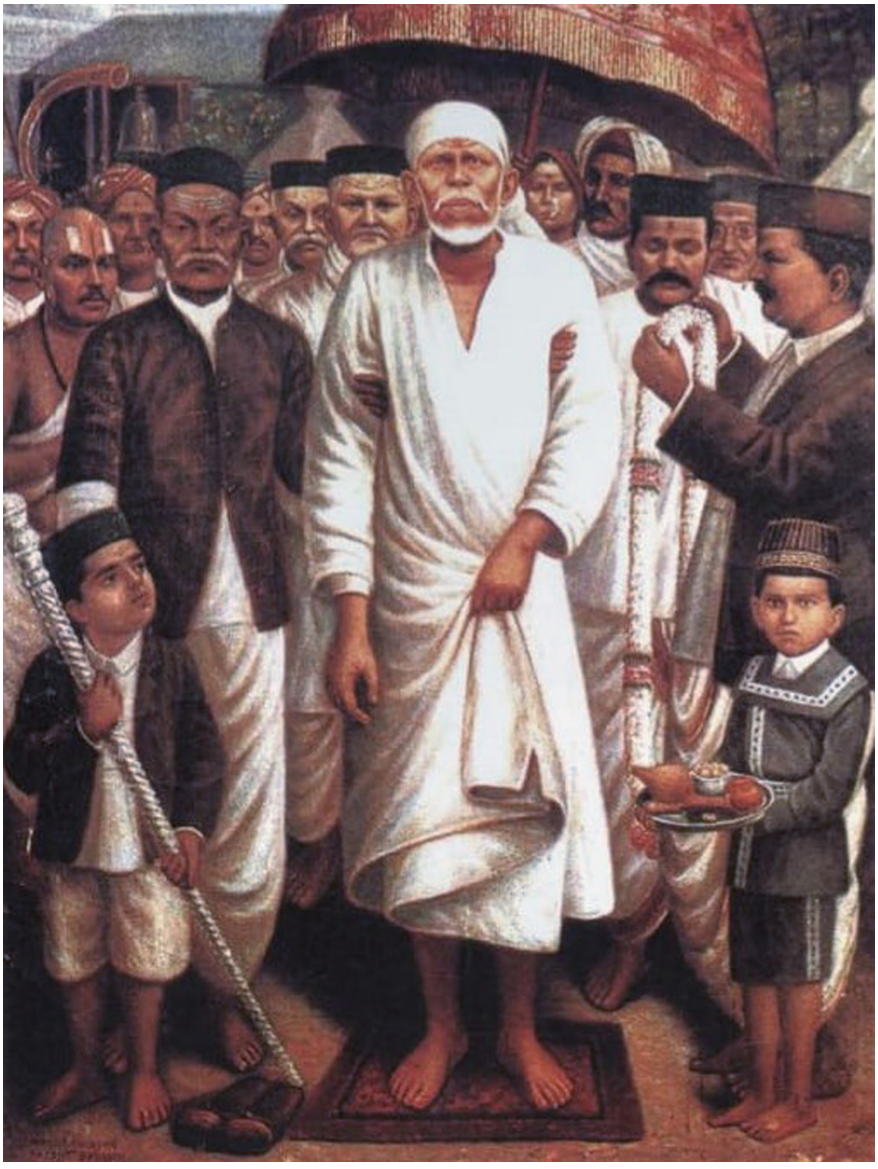


**Figure 13** Painting of the *cāvaḍī* procession

The fact that Sai Baba appeared to "speak to himself" was not an unusual scene. His statement that one should not be threatened and should not threaten others may have been intended especially for Khaparde, meaning that he as well as all devotees should rest assured of Sai Baba's protection: no need to fear the British or anyone/anything else. The action and reaction of "being threatened" and "threaten" is said to have no use and to do no good, i.e., it is condemned as a harmful, dualistic vicious circle from which one must free oneself. The reason why Khaparde and all *bhakta*s must not be afraid is that God almighty, i.e., Allāh, has "very high officers" who are "very powerful", implicitly suggesting that he himself is one of these and that he will always guard and preserve his children from all evil. The fact that he often repeated this statement and "appeared somewhat excited" was Sai Baba's way to reinforce the truth of his words and signal their utmost relevance. Thus he taught Khaparde the first and most important lesson: once a devotee reaches Shirdi – having been summoned by the master – and surrenders himself/herself to him, there is absolutely nothing to fear anymore. As a token of his grace, he distributed food as *prasād*[43] and the *udī*,[44] the sacred ash taken from the *dhunī*, his perpetually burning fire. Sai Baba would generally distribute the *udī* to all people at the end of his *darbār*s.



**Figure 14** The *dhunī* inside the mosque

**43** At the end of any Hindu ritual (*pūjā*), the deity's or the *guru*'s 'favor' (*prasād*) is materially conveyed through the distribution by the officiating priest(s) of food and a range of other previously made offerings. This food, usually a piece of fruit, cooked rice, sweets or even water or curds, is shared and consumed among all participants. These leftovers are considered to be blessed, i.e., imbued with the deity's/*guru*'s power and grace. On these issues, see Bühnemann, *Pūjā*, 84-5.

**44** On the *udī*'s alleged miraculous properties, see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 532-88 (chaps. 33-5). On sacred ash, see Rigopoulos, "*Vibhūti*", 181-3.

Shirdi, Wednesday 7 December 1910

In the morning after my prayer[45] Balasaheb Bhate[46] who is a retired Mamlatdar came to the Wada and sat talking with us. He has been staying here for some time, and has a peculiar kind of calm on his face.
*We saw Sayin Maharaj as he was going out and went to him in the Masjid in the afternoon.* I, Babasaheb Sahasrabuddhe, my son Baba, Bapusaheb Jog and children went together and sat there. *Sayin Maharaj appeared to be in good humor. He asked Babasaheb Sahasrabuddhe whether he came from Bombay.* Babasaheb replied in the affirmative. *Babasaheb was then asked whether he would return to Bombay.* He again replied in the affirmative, but added that he could not be certain of remaining there, as it would depend upon circumstances. *Sayin Maharaj remarked "Yes. It is true, you have many things on hand and have to undertake more. You should remain here some four or five days. You will be here, you should see for yourself. The experiences gone through are real. They are not fanciful.* ***I was here thousands years ago****". Then Sayin Maharaj turned to me and started on apparently a new track. He said:"This world is funny. All are my subjects. I look upon all equally, but some have become thieves and what can I do for them? People who are themselves very near death, desire and make preparations for the death of others. They offended me a great deal. They hurt me a good deal, but I said nothing. I kept quiet. God is very great and has his officers everywhere. They are all powerful. One must be content with the state in which God keeps him. But I am very powerful.* ***I was here eight or ten thousand years ago****".*
*My son asked him to tell a story as he told him before. Sayin Maharaj asked what story it was. My son replied that* ***it was a story about three brothers who went to a Masjid. One of them wished to go out and beg. The others did not want him to do that on the ground that the food obtained by begging would be impure and would pollute their chowka. The third brother replied that if the food spoilt the chowka his legs should be cut off and so on.*** *Sayin Maharaj said it was a very good story. He would tell another when he was in the humor.* My son said he did not know when the thing would happen, and if the humor recurred after he left, there would not be much use. *Thereupon Sayin Sahib told him that he should rest assured that the story would be told before he left.*
*I asked him why he was angry yesterday and he replied that it was because the Teli* [= oil vendor] *said something. Then I asked why he cried out "Do not beat. Do not beat" today at the time of the distribution of food, and he replied that he cried out because the Patil family was quarreling and divided among themselves. Sayin Saheb spoke with such*

**45** The morning *saṃdhyā* (lit. 'twilight'), sacred duty of all twice-born (*dvija*) Hindus, consists of the recitation of Vedic *mantra*s – typically the muttering (*japa*) of the *gāyatrī* which is repeated either ten, twenty-eight or one hundred and eight times – restraint of the breath (*prāṇāyāma*), sipping and sprinkling water, and pouring libations of water to the sun. It must be performed standing, facing east, until the sun appears.

**46** A revenue officer in Kopargaon since 1904. He was totally transformed after his first encounter with Sai Baba in 1909. On this Brahmin devotee, originally a skeptic who later resigned his post in order to stay in Shirdi and be close to the saint, see Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 118-19.

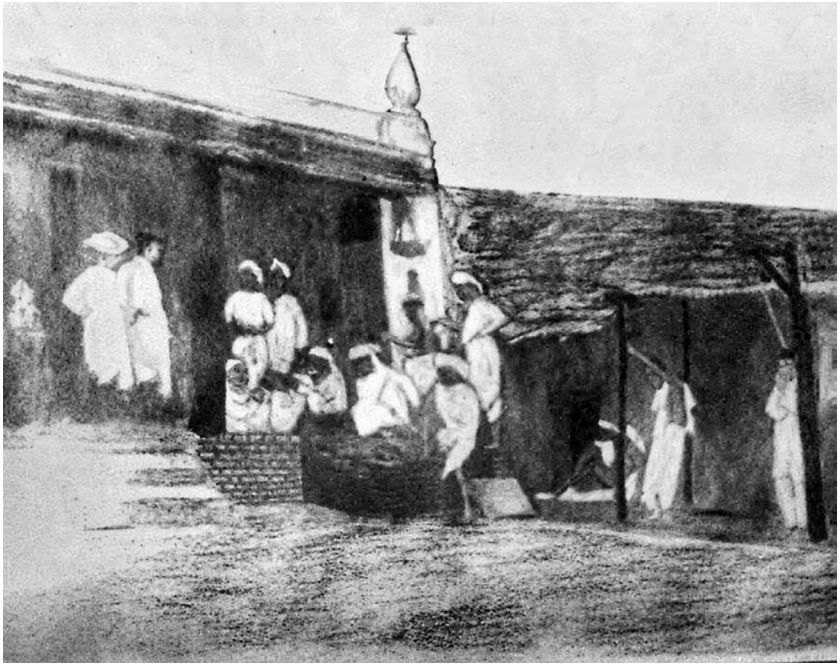


**Figure 15** In this old photo, we can see how Sai Baba's *darbār* appeared in the early 20th century. Sai Baba (seated) is looking at the *Tukārām Gāthā*, a collection of poems by the poet-saint Tukārām (d. 1650)

> *wonderful sweetness and he smiled so often and with such extraordinary grace, that the conversation will always remain engraved in my memory.* Unfortunately, other people came and the conversation was interrupted. We were so sorry for it but it could not be helped. We returned talking about it. Tatyasaheb Nulkar was not present during the first part of the conversation but came later on.
> Balasaheb Bhate came in the evening and we sat again talking about the conversation.

Khaparde's remark that Sai Baba "appeared to be in good humor" is noteworthy since his mood could change all of a sudden. In an instant he could pass from being most charming and tender to being angry and severe. In this way he kept all *bhakta*s and visitors on their toes. His recommendation to Babasaheb Sahasrabuddhe to remain in Shirdi for a few more days was meant to give him sufficient time to "see for himself", i.e., experience the truth of Sai Baba's words and deeds. One should never rely on what other people think or say but should always find out for himself/herself. The *faqīr* points out that what one experiences in his presence is not "fanciful", i.e., casual or the fruit of one's imagination, but absolutely real and concrete, be it a miracle (*camatkār*) or a word of instruction: all that happens must be accurately noted and assimilated, being meant for the devotee's spiritual growth. Thus even the *camatkār* (lit. 'wonder') is understood to be aimed at one's *saṃskār,* i.e., 'refinement', and is not to be mistaken as a mere display of power.

Sai Baba's statement of having been in Shirdi "thousands of years ago", further specified when he says that he was here "eight or ten thousand years ago", is meant to underline his ancient, ongoing karmic tie to the village and its people, i.e., his constant, loving care for them, which extends over many lives.[47]

Sai Baba's observation that "this world is funny", i.e., laughable and strange from his point of view, has to do with the fact that most people are ignorant and don't recognize that they are "all his subjects", i.e., that they are wholly dependent upon him: when they don't adhere to God's commandments they inevitably go astray. The statement that the world is funny can also be taken to mean that it is illusory, i.e., *māyā*. He further points out that he looks "upon all equally", with equanimity and justice. Prof. Ganpatrao G. Narke,[48] who first met the saint in April 1913 at the age of thirty, in an interview with B.V. Narasimhaswami (1874-1956)[49] in May 1936 noted:

> He was impartial and just. I have seen rich and highly placed persons going to him, being practically ignored by him, as he saw through the outside, into the real nature, or the heart of the person approaching him. I have also seen him pay great regard to and speak enthusiastically of some poor man that came to him, saying "He has much money" ("*pica*") i.e., much of *punya* [= merit] accumulated.[50]

And yet Sai Baba says that out of ignorance some "become thieves" and some "who are themselves very near death, desire and make preparations for the death of others", thus "offending and hurting him a great deal". Here the thieves are akin to murderers since Sai Baba alludes to evil people as well as evil forces that threaten the life of his devotees. The *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 31, vv. 36-8) reports that he once told a *saṃnyāsin*:

> Go, sit in peace; do not be sad. Let a few days pass and then we shall decide what to do. Have patience and courage. In the *wada* there are many thieves. Fasten the doors and be alert. For they will rob you of your all and attack you fiercely. Prosperity is never permanent, and so for this body, it is, forever, transient. Knowing that death is always near, conduct yourself according to *dharma*.[51]

By referring to people who are themselves very near death and yet desire and make preparations for the death of others, Sai Baba may have hinted at the political violence of his days. In other words, one could read here an implicit

**47** He would often give this assurance to devotees; see Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 38.

**48** A Brahmin professor of Geology and Chemistry in Pune University; see Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 14-28; Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 82-4; Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 229-35; Shepherd, *Faqir of Shirdi*, 112-13.

**49** The most influential propagator of Sai Baba devotion in the 20th century, though he personally never met the saint; see McLain, *The Afterlife of Sai Baba*, 91-132.

**50** Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 28. Tara Bai Sadasiva Tarkhad from Pune, whom Narasimhaswami interviewed in May 1936, also noted that Sai Baba "was never obsequious to the rich and high-placed, nor supercilious and contemptuous to the lowly"; Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 73. On his equality of vision, see the saint's words as reported in Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 10-11.

**51** Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 503.

criticism of Khaparde's (and Tilak's) sympathy for the revolutionaries and their violent deeds, though Khaparde himself had never acted violently. The saint may have had in mind recent political assassinations, such as the ones perpetrated by Prafulla Chaki and Khudiram Bose (in 1908) or by Dhingra (in 1909), or even prophetically refer to future events, such as the homicide of the civil servant Robert Ashe (1872-1911) who, few months later, on 17 June 1911, would be assassinated by a young Indian, Vanchinathan, at the Maniyachi railway junction, between Tirunelveli and Tuticorin, in Tamil Nadu: he was the first and only colonial officer to be murdered in South India during the struggle for independence.[52] What is certain is that Sai Baba was opposed to all forms of violence, "which offend and hurt him a great deal",[53] be it from the Indian side or from the British side – his mention of the thieves could well refer to them, due to their appropriation of India's resources – and thus he implicitly warned Khaparde and all his devotees from having anything to do with it.[54] Dabholkar's *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 10, v. 54) points out that the essence of Sai Baba's teaching was to counter violence with love: "Even when someone harms you, you should not retaliate; but do him a good turn, instead, whenever possible".[55]

Sai Baba further notes that he "says nothing and keeps quiet", he being the witness (*sākṣin*) of all that takes place. He distinguishes himself from God, who is "very great" – indeed the greater/greatest (*akbar*) of all –[56] and confirms to be one of his ubiquitous, "very powerful" officers or lieutenants.[57] Kevin Shepherd cogently writes:

> This attitude is strongly reminiscent of the Sufi view of God and the 'spiritual hierarchy' who oversee human affairs. The saints are effectively kings in the inner world, but silenced by oppressive activities of the ignorant, who cause confusion in the outer world. Nevertheless, the real power is with the saints or 'masters'.[58]

Again, Ganpatrao G. Narke's observations are important in this regard:

> No doubt, in certain ecstatic moods, he said (and I heard this myself) *maiṁ allā hūṁ*, "*I am God* [= Allāh]". But this was once in a way. His

**52** Vanchinathan, the murderer, was a supporter of the freedom fighter V.O. Chidambaram Pillai (1872-1936), a follower of Tilak; see Khilnani, *Incarnations*, 227-36.

**53** He taught that one should adhere strictly to nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*) toward all creatures, human beings as well as animals; see Nimbalkar, *Teachings and Philosophy*, 82-6; Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 342-3.

**54** Incidentally, on 20 February 1910, the Maharashtrian Chitpavan Brahmin Nathuram Vinayak Godse, the assassin of M.K. Gandhi, was born. He was executed in 1949.

**55** Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 153.

**56** On 20 February 1912, Khaparde similarly notes that the saint's only words when he left the *cāvaḍī* and entered the mosque were "God is the greatest, of all". On 9 March 1912, he remarks that "he blessed as usual by saying that God was higher than all". Though the *faqīr*'s original words are not given it may be assumed that he uttered *Allāh Akbar* or his favorite formula *Allāh Mālik*.

**57** In the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 21, vv. 16-17), Dabholkar states: "Just as an emperor of the whole earth has his officers posted at various camps, in different regions of his kingdom and thus brings prosperity to it, similarly this Emperor of the Joyful Self [= God] appears in different places [through his saints] and steers the ship of his empire smoothly by guiding its course secretly"; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 338.

**58** Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 260-1.

> usual – almost invariable – role was that of a devotee of God entrusted with vast powers to carry out what God (the "Fakir") directs. *"Allah Malik"*, "*God* [= Allāh] *is the master*",[59] *"Allah Bhale Karenga*", "*God* [= Allāh] *will bless*" were constantly on his lips. Also, *"I am God's slave. I remember God"*, etc.[60]

His saying that "one must be content with the state in which God keeps him", i.e., that one must accept one's fate, was especially relevant for Khaparde given the difficult political and economic situation which he had to face at the time.

Significant is the detail of Khaparde's son asking the saint to "tell a story as he told him before". It means that he had already heard one from the *faqīr*, either on the previous day or on the day of their arrival, though his father is silent about it. Apparently, however, the saint did not even remember and asked, "What story was it?", thereby providing indirect confirmation that he was in the habit of telling *goṣṭ*ies. The eagerness of Khaparde's son Balkrishna to listen to Sai Baba's tales reveals one of the fundamental characteristics of a parable, i.e., its power of involvement: anyone who listened to the *faqīr*'s *goṣṭ*ies was captured by them and felt that they were directed specifically at him/her. The audience was therefore not passive but became actively involved in trying to decipher and figure out the meaning of these narratives. Balkrishna's eagerness tells us of Sai Baba's ability to capture the attention of his audience, of his prowess as a story-teller. To him who was anxious to listen to another *goṣṭ*, Sai Baba remarks that it cannot be done automatically but that he must be "in the humor", i.e., in the right mood, which is inevitably influenced by the context, i.e., the people surrounding him: everything must be done at the appropriate time. Nonetheless, at Balkrishna's insistence, the saint kindly promises that he will tell him another story before his departure.

The tale summarized by Khaparde's son, with its reference to a mosque, implies that the three brothers who went to it were Muslims. The brother who wished to go out and beg for food may be identified as a *faqīr*, possibly an alter-ego of Sai Baba. The two brothers who don't want him to beg saying that the food so obtained would be impure and pollute their kitchen (*chowka*),[61] represent worldly people who are caught up in the dual

**59** Gazing into the fire of the *dhunī* inside the *masjid*, Sai Baba would ceaselessly chant or repeat the formula *Allāh Mālik*. He was absorbed in the repetition of the sacred name at all times; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 81 (chap. 5, v. 94), 107 (chap. 7, v. 30), 151 (chap. 10, v. 31), 372 (chap. 23, v. 8), 709 (chap. 43, v. 47), 722 (chap. 44, v. 4), 761 (chap. 46, v. 111). He never allowed the *dhunī* to extinguish itself and constantly fed it with new logs: "Be it summer, winter, autumn or spring or monsoon, Baba kept the *dhuni* burning in the mosque, twenty-four hours"; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 378 (chap. 23, v. 84). Perpetual fire is symbolic of divine presence. One is reminded of Moses and the bush that, though on fire, did not burn up (*Exodus* 3:1-3).

**60** Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 27. See also M.B. Rege's testimony in *ibid.*, 11. The *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 34, v. 130) reports these words of Sai Baba: "I am neither God nor the Supreme Being. I am not '*Anal Haq*' (God) either; I am '*Yade Haq*', one who constantly remembers God. I am Allah's most humble slave"; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 565. See also Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 371-2 (chap. 23, vv. 4, 8). For an episode in which Sai Baba explicitly refused to be referred to as God, see Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 38-9. Sai Baba used the word 'Fakir' to designate Allāh on several occasions. We read: "Hallo. Do I demand *dakshina* of every one? I demand only from those whom 'The Fakir' points out to me"; Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 17. See also Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 1, 270.

**61** A cleaned area (often smeared with cow dung) within a traditional household used for cooking or rituals. It could also be interpreted to mean an open market area, in which case the correct spelling would be *chowk*.

viewpoint of pure versus impure, with all its rules and regulations. The wise brother's reply that the begged food will in no way spoil the *chowka* and that if it did "his legs should be cut off and so on", is meant to teach that one must transcend the pure/impure dichotomy and learn to recognize God's omnipresence. It also teaches a lesson in humility since the idea is that we are all beggars, i.e., dependent upon God for our sustenance. What emerges is Sai Baba's critique of all dualist separations – clean/unclean, sacred/profane – and his upholding of true brotherhood, i.e., equality. The possibility that there might be autobiographical reminiscences in this tale cannot be ruled out.

With regard to Khaparde's first question on why the day before he appeared to be angry, Sai Baba replies that "it was because the Teli, i.e., the oil vendor, said something". As Khaparde himself will note in an entry dated 21 January 1912, Sai Baba's talking of *telī*, etc. "followed the usual custom of using hard words against the internal enemies".[62] The saint's reference to *telī* but also to *vāṇī* (= grocer), Marwadi, etc. was symbolic for referring to a variety of evil traits within man such as the 'six enemies' (*ṣaḍripu*s), i.e., lust, anger, greed, hatred, pride and envy or jealousy.[63] On several occasions he would say that he had a fight with the *telī*s, etc. and that he would not go to them and never beg of them. As oil vendors often wanted too much for their wares, his saying alluded to people who were greedy and in various ways cheated their fellow men and misbehaved themselves.[64] It must be remembered that Sai Baba's first public miracle was his turning water into oil, when the *telī*s conspired against him refusing to give him oil.[65] The *faqīr* was fond of lighting lamps and would do so daily with the oil he begged from the local grocers.

At Khaparde's query on why he repeatedly shouted "Do not beat" during the distribution of food at the mosque, Sai Baba's answer that he did so because the Patils at home were quarreling, reveals an instance of his purported omniscience. The saint had a strong bond with the local Patil family: he begged daily at their house being especially fond of Bayajabai Kote Patil, the lady who regularly brought him food in the forest in the early days, and of her son Tatya Kote Patil (d. 1945), who knew Sai Baba from the age of seven and was most dear to him.[66] The fact that he could stop their quarrel and the execution of a violent act by simply uttering "Do not beat"

**62** The saint would refer to these enemies also by citing the names of particular Shirdi villagers such as Appa Kote, Waman Tatya, etc.; see Khaparde's entry dated 21 January 1912.

**63** When Sai Baba asked for six rupees *dakṣiṇā* from someone, it meant that he asked to surrender to him the six internal enemies; see Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 79, 136-7.

**64** See Shepherd, *Faqir of Shirdi*, 141-2; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 696 (chap. 42, v. 70). "Oil is sticky and soft and is considered to be a symbol of the love of worldly life"; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 588 fn. 1.

**65** See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 81-2 (chap. 5, vv. 101-14). On this episode, see Loar, "Sai Baba's Lamp-Lighting Miracle", 69-73.

**66** The *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 37, v. 131) states: "Tatya called Baba '*Mama*' (uncle). Such was their mutual affection that there is no parallel to the feeling of affinity between them"; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 616. There is a belief that Sai Baba passed away in lieu of Tatya, whose life was saved by the saint; see *ibid.*, 694-6 (chap. 42, vv. 51-68). On Tatya Kote Patil, see Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 145-6.

while at the mosque, is meant to prove the efficacy of his word and that his orders were supreme as he explicitly stated on various occasions.[67]

Noteworthy is Khaparde's final remark that Sai Baba spoke with "wonderful sweetness" and that he repeatedly "smiled with extraordinary grace", so much so that this conversation "will always remain engraved in my memory".

> Shirdi, Thursday 8 December 1910
>
> In the morning after prayer, *we saw Sayin Saheb as usual when he was going out. Later on we went to see him in the afternoon but had to turn back as he was washing his feet.* Babasaheb Sahasrabuddhe, myself and my son and Mr. Pradhan[68] who came this morning formed the company that went and had to return. Tatyasaheb Nulkar did not accompany us. Later on we went again [to the *masjid*], *but Sayin Saheb dismissed us very soon.* So we returned. *He appeared very much engaged in thinking out something. At night, Sayin Saheb slept in the Chavadi and we went to see the procession.*[69] It was very nice.
> Mr. Pradhan mentioned above is a police officer, I believe, head constable. He was charged with extorting money and tried by the Court of Sessions. He vowed to visit Sayin Maharaj if he was acquitted. He was acquitted and came to fulfill his vow. *On seeing him Sayin Maharaj appeared affected and said: "Why did you not stay a few days there? The poor people must have felt disappointed". He repeated this twice.* We learned afterwards that Pradhan's friends pressed him to stay and that he did not comply with their request. He had never seen Sayin Saheb before and of course the latter could not have seen him before. The wonder is how Sayin Maharaj knew him and said what he did.

Clearly the *faqīr* wished to be left alone. Over the years, with his popularity as a miracle-worker constantly growing, Shirdi came to be more and more 'invaded' by visitors and it was almost impossible for Sai Baba to safeguard his privacy. As he told Khaparde on 5 December, "he found no rest as people troubled him. It could not be helped". Thus, when he felt he needed to be by himself he dismissed everyone from the mosque.

His pensive attitude, a trait which he often exhibited, intrigued all *bhakta*s given that Sai Baba was inscrutable and very seldom did he disclose his thoughts. Whenever he was seen "very much engaged in thinking out something", devotees believed that he was mystically operating on transcendent planes or that he was intervening through his powers to contact and help persons who lived in distant, far-off places. The *faqīr*

**67** For instance, on 22 January 1912; see also Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 2: 330-1.

**68** Not to be confused with Rao Bahadur Moreshwar W. Pradhan (1879-1947), magistrate of the Bombay High Court; see Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 86-8.

**69** This procession was started a year before, on 10 December 1909; see Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 208-12. For a detailed description of Sai Baba's procession to the *cāvaḍī*, see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 615-23 (chap. 37, vv. 116-212). A source reports that when the *faqīr* slept at the *cāvaḍī* two youngsters, i.e., Babu Dixit (Kaka Saheb Dixit's elder son) and Babu Bhate (Bala Saheb Bhate's elder son), "would don *zari toopies* (gold- or silver-trimmed hats) and pretend they were Baba's *chopdars*. They would hold a stick and stand at the entrance of the *Chavdi*, and give *lalkari* (salutations), saying *'Aalbeli Sarkar aaram kaari'* ('Take rest now, unique Majesty')"; Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 66.

himself pointed out that he was a slave of his devotees and that "he cared more for his people than even for his own life", as he said on 5 December.

Through his words to Mr. Pradhan, Sai Baba demonstrated his *antarajñāna*. Apparently, this was something the Shirdi villagers were used to: the sources describe many cases of the saint's clairvoyance. Sai Baba's words to this police officer – which he repeated twice – were a rebuke to his decision of leaving his place immediately in order to rush to Shirdi and fulfill his vow. The lesson here is that there was no need to hurry. What Pradhan should have given precedence to was the request of his friends to stay with them "a few days". Instead, by leaving right away, "the poor people must have felt disappointed". Sai Baba points out that what must be given priority to is the cultivation of friendship. Hospitality should never be shunned since fraternal communion always takes precedence over ritual observances. To be sure, vows are important and must be fulfilled but Mr. Pradhan, who had no 'scheduled appointment', should have stayed with his friends and could have reached Shirdi a few days later. Everything would have been just fine. Sai Baba is keen to teach him that in his inflexibility and haste there was a lack of compassion and good sense: *est modus in rebus*.

> Shirdi, Friday 9 December 1910
>
> I and my son intended going away today. In the morning, after prayer, *when we went as usual to see Sayin Maharaj, he asked my son if he intended going away and added that we may go away*. We thought the necessary permission had been granted and made ready to start. Baba packed all things, and engaged a spring cart and another to carry our things, and *in the afternoon went to formally see the Sayin Maharaj before actually starting*.
> *On seeing me Sayin Saheb said, "Do you really intend going?" I replied, "I wish to go but not if you do not permit". He said, "Then you may go tomorrow or the day after. This is our house. The Wada is our house and why need anybody be afraid while I am here? This is our house and you should look upon it as your own house"*. I agreed to stay and countermanded all arrangements for departure. *We sat down talking. Sayin Maharaj was in a very pleasant mood and said many pleasant things but I am afraid I did not understand him.*
> A young man by name Shridhan Mongi came. He is very good and carefully brought up. Sayin Maharaj got him to stay on. Mr. Pradhan is also very nice. We, i.e. I, Babasaheb Sahasrabuddhe and Pradhan went out for a long walk. My son Baba and Mr. Nulkar went out also with us but remained behind.

Khaparde wished to go back to Amravati and resume his legal and political activity. He was probably anxious to do so. Nonetheless, he would have never left Shirdi without Sai Baba's permission, as it was customary, and thus at his words he immediately changed his plan and obediently accepted to stay a few more days. [70] After all, Khaparde's son had not yet listened to the story that Sai Baba had promised to tell him before they left. The shared opinion was that if somebody left without the saint's explicit permission and blessing, one was

**70** In order to leave Shirdi, everyone was supposed to ask the saint's permission; see Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 31.

destined to encounter all sorts of difficulties: the hagiographical literature reports many such instances. Moreover, all devotees firmly believed that no one could ever come to Shirdi in the first place unless Sai Baba called him/her.[71] Therefore, if it was the saint who called someone to him, inviting him/her to his abode, one was expected to leave only when the master of the house would give his permission, i.e., when he would decide that the purpose for which he had called that person had been accomplished.

Significantly, Sai Baba tells Khaparde that the *masjid* – which he had renamed Dvārakāmāī, "the many-gated mother" – is a place open to all, it being the veritable house of all his devotees irrespective of caste, creed, sex, etc. As he used to say:

> This is *Dwaraka Mayi* of ours on which you are sitting. This wards off all danger and anxieties from her children. Highly merciful is this *Masidi Ayi* [= Mother Mosque]. She is the mother of those who place *their entire faith in her*. If they are in danger, *she will save them*. Once a person climbs into her lap, all his *troubles are over*. He who sleeps in her shade attains *bliss*.[72]

Thus no devotee should have any fear since Sai Baba, as their father and mother, is here on earth to take care of them. These assurances were especially important for Khaparde – already on 6 December the saint had told him that there was nothing to fear – and were meant to underline that he was fully under the saint's protection. With regard to the devotees' experience of the saint's shelter, noteworthy are the words of Tara Bai Sadasiva Tarkhad:

> It is not merely his power that endeared him to his devotees. His loving care combined with those powers made Shirdi a veritable paradise to the devotees who went there. Directly we went there, we felt safe, that nothing could harm us. When I went and sat in his presence, I always forgot my pain – nay the body itself with all mundane concerns and anxieties. Hours would pass and I would be in blissful unconsciousness of their passing. That was unique experience shared, I believe, by all his real devotees. He was all in all and the All for us. We never could think of his having limitations.[73]

As in the case of Mr. Pradhan, Khaparde and his son are asked not to be in a hurry to leave Shirdi but rather to sit down and relax. They need not go anywhere since by coming to Shirdi they have reached their ultimate destination and true abode, where they can be in communion with their lord.

**71** See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 837 (chap. 51, v. 30).

**72** Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 1. See also Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 354-5 (chap. 22, vv. 47-51), 556 (chap. 34, v. 24), 713 (chap. 43, vv. 90-1); Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 37. From a comparative perspective, the inclusive symbolism of Dvārakāmāī calls to mind *Isaiah* 56:7 and its vision of a sacred space open to all peoples: "for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples". Significantly, this same verse is cited by Jesus in reference to the Jerusalem Temple: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (*Mark* 11:17; cf. *Matthew* 21:13; *Luke* 19:46).

**73** Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 71.

Thus they are advised to cultivate fraternity and stay a few more days with their master and friends, i.e., the community of *bhakta*s.

Again Khaparde highlights that the saint was "in a very pleased mood" and that he said "many pleasant things", showering his grace upon them. He candidly admits, however, that he "did not understand" what the *faqīr* said. This is a noteworthy statement, since it confirms Sai Baba's tendency to express himself in cryptic ways, i.e., through a symbolic, figurative language. This was the common experience of devotees, be they sophisticated intellectuals like Khaparde or illiterate people.[74] And yet the belief among *bhakta*s was that Sai Baba's words – be they gracious or abusive – were unfailingly efficacious, being akin to powerful *mantra*s: even if one did not understand them, they were destined to achieve their goal and come to fruition.

> Shirdi, Saturday 10 December 1910
>
> In the morning after prayer I told my son Baba never to mention anything about our going away to Sayin Maharaj. He knows all and would know when to send us away. As usual *we saw Sayin Saheb as he was going out, and later on when we went to the Masjid. Sayin Saheb was very much pleased and* ***told the story of a former life of a young girl who was playing with him. He said she was an artist and died and was as usual buried. Sayin Saheb passed that way and spent a night near her tomb. So she accompanied him. He kept her in a Babul tree and then brought her here. He said he was Kabir before and used to spin yarn.*** *The conversation was exceedingly pleasant.*
> In the afternoon Mr. Shridhan Paranjape of Wardha accompanied by one Mr. Pandit, another doctor and a third, came. Mr. Patwardhan junior of Ahmednagar was there. My son and he are old college friends. *They all went to see Sayin Saheb and we all accompanied them. Sayin Saheb treated them the same way as he treats everybody,and talked first of Teli, Marwadi, etc. Then he talked of buildings that are being put up and added: "The world is gone mad. Every man has acquired a peculiarity of evil thinking. I never put myself on an equality with any of them. So I never listen to what they say. Nay, I never reply. What should I reply?" He then distributed 'Udi' and told us to return to the Wada. He singled out Patwardhan junior and told him to stay behind, as usual mentioning 'tomorrow' as the day of departure.* I and Babasaheb Sahasrabuddhe returned to the Wada. It appears Paranjape and his companions went to the lady Radhakrishna. Somehow Babasaheb Sahasrabuddhe went there, but apparently was not treated as he deserved to be. Bapusaheb Jog's wife has been ill. *She has benefited very much by what Sayin Saheb says and gives as medicine* but apparently she lost patience today and wanted to go away. Even Bapusaheb Jog, out of sheer helplessness, agreed to let her go. *Sayin Saheb made repeated enquiries about her and when she was going.* When, however, in the evening Bapusaheb Jog proposed to go formally to Sayin Saheb for asking permission, she said she felt better and did not wish to go. We wondered.

**74** See an incident reported in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* with one Balasaheb Deo as protagonist; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita,* 681-7 (chap. 41, vv. 74-153). See also Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life,* 145-7.

It is noticeable that Khaparde told his son "never to mention anything about our going away to Sayin Maharaj". It shows his complete faith in Sai Baba: no need to bother him on this subject anymore since he will not fail to tell them when they should leave. Evidently, Khaparde regretted the fact that they had been too pushy on the matter.

Again Khaparde observes that Sai Baba was "very much pleased" and in the vein of telling a story which is an instance of his *antarajñāna* and extraordinary powers, where he himself is protagonist. The fact that this tale is about the former life of a young girl who was playing with him at the mosque is remarkable. The *faqīr* enjoyed the company of children and he often played with them. We read: "We [children, aged 8 and 10] often played with him and climbed on his back and sat on his shoulders. Every morning we massaged his feet that were as soft as butter, with fragrance of sandalwood".[75] His naturalness in speaking of his and other people's previous lives and their reciprocal ties – a common subject of his tales and utterances – proves to what extent the belief in rebirth (*punarjanman*) was shared by all. The fact that this girl, who had been an artist, was "as usual buried" when she died, indicates that she was not a Hindu but a Muslim. Moreover, the fact that he spent the entire night by her tomb suggests a deep karmic connection between them. Apparently, his power of attraction was so strong that she decided to "accompany" him when he moved away from the tomb, which means that her spirit left the place and followed him. Sai Baba is said to have kept her always near to himself, first by placing her spirit in a Babul tree[76] (*Acacia nilotica*) under which he had settled – trees are often thought to be the abode of spirits in Indian lore – and finally by bringing it with him to Shirdi where she was reborn, presumably as the daughter of a local villager.[77] Clearly this is not an allegorical tale, being the disclosure of a person's previous birth and recent karmic trajectory, and of how he took care of her.

**75** Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 41. A devotee by name Shantabai Joshi, who since 1913 accompanied her father on his visits to Shirdi, recalls: "I saw Baba when I was a child, but I vividly remember how he sat under his neem tree. […] [T]here was a sort of parapet built under the tree. The children from the village and I would play there in the afternoon. The tree was luscious and had plenty of yellow fruit that we would gather. In our attempt to gather large amounts of fruit, we would climb all over Baba, but not for a moment did he ever waver from his meditative trance nor did he ever scold or hit us. When we troubled him beyond measure he would take a dried branch of the neem and hit it on the parapet to drive us away. Oftentimes he sang songs to amuse us; one particular song that I liked described how the moon was hiding amongst the branches of the neem tree and Baba asks it to come out and show us its face. Finally, he asks the moon to give us plenty of *chapattis* (flat unleavened bread) drenched in clarified butter and sugar. The children who played with me were very poor; their parents were farmers, migrant workers and labourers who laid roads. It was very convenient for them to leave their children with Baba. They knew that their children were safe and wouldn't be harmed, as they would be looked after by Baba. Indeed, we were fortunate that the Lord of the universe took care of us and wiped our 'snotty noses'. […] Baba lived a life of utter simplicity, and his needs were meager. I have never seen him wear any footwear, nor did he don a new *kafni* although many *kafnis* were stacked in the Dwarka Mai. Baba never yearned for expensive clothes or jewelry. Now, I am mystified to see his Samadhi Mandir decked in gold, with utensils of gold all around. All this pomp and show is quite contrary to the life he lived" (Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 29). On Sai Baba's special relationship with children, see Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 184-6.

**76** It has been suggested that Sai Baba, before coming to Shirdi, stayed on the outskirts of the village in a Babul forest for about two and a half years; see Kamath, Kher, *Sai Baba of Shirdi*, 7.

**77** B.V. Narasimhaswami rubricates this story under the following title: "Baba's Control over Departed Spirits and Guidance of them"; see Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 146.

It is noteworthy that Sai Baba openly states that, in one of his previous lives, he was the great 15th-century poet-saint Kabīr, who "used to spin yarn" as a weaver (*julāhā*). With his Hindu devotees, he often identified himself with their chosen deities (*iṣṭadevatā*s) – such as Viṭṭhala, Dattātreya, Kṛṣṇa, etc. –[78] as well as with various saints who were his contemporaries. Kabīr, however, is the only human figure of the past with whom he explicitly identified himself. Narasimhaswami observes: "Kabir according to Baba was his former Avatar […] Kabir's songs were sung by Baba especially in his earlier days at the *takia* [= resting-place for Muslim visitors]. Baba included Kabir amongst his inspiring agencies, and once said: 'Kabir was my Guru'".[79] Sai Baba plainly stated that his creed/religion was Kabīr, electing him as his paradigmatic model.[80] Ganpatrao G. Narke, in a letter written to prominent devotee Hari Sitaram Dixit (1864-1926),[81] states that still in March 1918 Sai Baba "narrated many parables and stories. Most of the stories were about Namdev and Kabir".[82]

**78** As is typical of Sai Baba, if on the one hand he denied being God, rather describing himself as a slave of God, yet he frequently identified himself with Hindu deities; see Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 9-17.

**79** Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 3: 155-6. See also Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 62. On Kabīr as Sai Baba's model, see my book *The Life and Teachings of Sai Baba of Shirdi*. For an overview, see Rigopoulos, *The Hagiographer and the Avatar*, 195-7.

**80** See the testimony given in June 1936 by Das Ganu, of when Sai Baba was heard as a witness in a case of theft by Nana Joshi, first-class magistrate of the Dhulia Court; Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 129. See also Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 62, 256. Abdul Ghani Munsiff, a follower of Meher Baba, reports that "during the war years [= First World War], Sai Baba would often say: 'I am formless and I am everywhere. I am not this body you call Sai… I am the Supreme Soul-the entire creation. I am everything and I am in everyone. I am in saints, criminals, animals, and everything else… Nothing happens without my wish. My light is of God; my religion is *Kabiri* – Perfect Mastery – and my wealth lies in the blessings I alone can give'"; Munsiff, *Sai Baba*, 57. This book is a compilation of Munsiff's writings which originally appeared in the *Meher Baba Journal* (1938-42).

**81** Often referred to as Kaka Saheb/Kakasaheb Dixit. He came to know about Sai Baba from his old friend Nanasaheb Chandorkar. A wealthy Bombay solicitor and a high-caste Brahmin, H.S. Dixit was an active member of the Indian National Congress having been elected in the Bombay Legislative Council in 1901. Unlike Khaparde, he belonged to the Moderate group of the Indian National Congress. Nonetheless, it should be noted that he was a friend of Tilak and acted as his solicitor in various court cases filed against him. Dixit first arrived in Shirdi in November 1909, at the age of forty-five. In 1912, he decided to close his lucrative practice and made Shirdi his home. On Hari Sitaram Dixit, see Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 104-7. See also Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 69 (chap. 4, vv. 157-8), 747 (chap. 45, vv. 100-4), 836-43 (chap. 51, vv. 19-110); Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 2: 155-211; Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 46-7; Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 176-9; Shepherd, *Faqir of Shirdi*, 117-20. In 1924, Dixit wrote a Marāṭhī diary that was published two years later as *Dixit Diary*: having started visiting Shirdi in 1909, this source covers precious memories on Sai Baba from that year onward and can be usefully compared with Khaparde's diary. Dixit's diary has been translated into English by S.M. Garge; see Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 271-2; *The Diary of Kakasaheb Dixit*, at `https://guruvani.us/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/kakasaheb-dixits-diary1.pdf`. On Dixit's memoranda, see also Shepherd, *Faqir of Shirdi*, 63-71.

**82** Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 19. Though Nāmdev was a devotee of Viṭṭhal of Pandharpur, he – just like Kabīr – also worshipped the unqualified (*nirguṇa*) Absolute, typically referred to as Rām. On Nāmdev, see Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory*. On Nāmdev's and Kabīr's stories in Marāṭhī hagiography, see Abbott, Godbole, *Stories of Indian Saints*, 57-122, 177-259, 320-57, 377-400. See also Abbott, Godbole, Edwards, *Nectar from Indian Saints*, lvi, 4, 72, 186-7, 196, 202, 205, 207, 336, 421, 423, 426.



**Figure 16**
Hari Sitaram Dixit, known as Kakasaheb Dixit

Again Khaparde points out how Sai Baba's whole conversation was "exceedingly pleasant", the charismatic *faqīr* being able to mesmerize the whole audience. The diarist further notes that the saint treated some new visitors "the same way as he treats everybody", i.e., with impartiality, and that he "talked first of Teli, Marwadi, etc.", meaning that, as he did three days before on 7 December, he symbolically referred to the evil tendencies that abide within man, i.e., the six enemies of lust, anger, greed, hatred, pride and envy.

The buildings which Sai Baba mentioned are a reference to the Dixit *vāḍā*: a new, more spacious visitor's lodge that was built by H.S. Dixit, the foundation of which began with the holy man's consent precisely on this day and was brought to completion on 12 March 1911.[83] Sai Baba further reiterated his observations on the world's craziness and the evil thinking of men: he distances himself from it all, "never putting himself on an equality with any of them", pointing out that he neither listens nor replies to evil people.

The reference to the illness of Bapu Saheb Jog's wife who "had benefited very much from what Sai Baba told her and gave her as medicine", reminds us that the saint from his early years in Shirdi had a reputation as a *hakīm*, i.e., a doctor with knowledge of herbs and medicinal plants.[84]

**83** On the Dixit *vāḍā*, see Satpathy, *New Findings*, 83-90. See also Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 69-70 (chap. 4, vv. 160-1, 164).

**84** The term *hakīm* identifies a Muslim physician practicing the Unani system of medicine.

Shirdi, Sunday 11 December 1910

In the morning after I finished my prayer and had a wash, [I and] Mr. Haribhau Dixit of Bombay with a few companions, Mr. Tarkhadkas son of the late Dr. Atmaram Pandurang, and Mr. Mahajani, who is a cousin of Annasaheb Mahajani of Akola, *went to Sayin Saheb as usual* and today's conversation was both important and marked by two incidents. ***Sayin Maharaj said that he used to sit in a corner and desired to exchange the lower part of his body for that of a parrot. The exchange came and he did not realize for a year and lost one lakh of rupees. Then he began to sit near a post and then a great serpent woke up and was very angry. It used to jump up and also fall from above. Then he changed the subject apparently and said that he visited a place and the Patil there would not let him go unless he made a plantation and had a footpath through it. He said he completed both.***
Some people came in at this time. ***To the man, he said,"You were a Rohilla[85] before and were looted and made later on into a Bania".[86] To the woman, he said: "You have nobody but me to look after you". Looking round he added that she was a relation of his and had married the Rohillas who looted the man.*** *Then he said that the world is bad. People were not as they were before. Formerly they used to be pious and trustful. Now they were unbelieving and disposed to contemplate the evil side, and* ***then he added something which I could not catch. It was something about his father, grandfather and his becoming the one and the other alternatively.***
Now as to the incidents, Mr. Dixit brought fruits. *Sayin Saheb ate some and was distributing the others.* Balasaheb, Mamlatdar of this Taluk, was there and said that Sayin Maharaj was giving away only fruits of one kind. My son told his friend Mr. Patwardhan that Sayin Maharaj accepted or refused fruits in proportion to the devotion with which they were offered. My son Baba tried to tell this to me and wished to do the same to Patwardhan.[87] *This made a little noise and Sayin Maharaj looked at me with an eye that blazed wonderfully and sparkled with anger. He demanded what I said.* I replied that I was saying nothing and that children were talking with each other. *He looked at my son and Patwardhan and changed the mood completely.* Towards the close, Balasaheb Mirikar remarked that *Sayin Maharaj was talking all through to Haribhau Dixit.*
In the afternoon, while we were at meals, Mr. Mirikar's father who is an Inamdar and a special magistrate at Ahmednagar came. He is a very respectable gentleman of the old stamp. I liked his conversation very much.
In the evening, *we saw Sayin Saheb as usual* and at night we sat talking, and Mr. Nulkar's son Vishwanath did Bhajan as he does every day.

**85** A large Muslim or Rājput community of Pashtun/Pathan heritage, the Rohillas are historically found in Rohilkhand, a region in the State of Uttar Pradesh, but are numerous also in the Deccan. Apparently, several Rohillas used to visit Sai Baba; see Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation,* 151-5. A testimony states that in 1914 "there was a *Pathan* residing in Shirdi […] and he was constantly at Baba's side and sometimes Baba got angry with him"; Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony,* 74.

**86** A caste of merchants and moneylenders found chiefly in northern and western India.

**87** Since Balkrishna had already told Patwardhan that Sai Baba "accepted or refused fruits in proportion to the devotion with which they were offered", what is implied is that he wished to further elaborate on this topic.



**Figure 17** The Dixit *vāḍā*

The first story narrated by Sai Baba, in which he figures as protagonist, must have filled his listeners with bewilderment. The holy man enjoyed puzzling his devotees with apparently abstruse tales. It should be understood symbolically, though Sai Baba may have meant it quite literally, i.e., as something that had actually happened to him, possibly in this life. The fact that he used to "sit in a corner" may hint at a contemplative exercise of his. And the fact that his desire came true, i.e., "exchanging the lower part of his body for that of a parrot", may be interpreted to mean that he was granted this experience due to the efficacy of his spiritual powers (*karāma*s, *siddhi*s). His remark that for a whole year he was not aware of the exchange may imply that he forgot himself, i.e., his true identity, being totally immersed in his 'parrot identity'. The *imitatio* of birds and animals and the actual identification with them is a well-known characteristic of ascetics and renouncers.[88] In Hindu lore, metamorphosis (*rūpaparivartana*) or the ability to exchange one's body or part of one's body with someone else and in particular with an animal (therianthropism) is a distinctive trait of various *yogī*s,[89] deities and supernatural beings such as the Nāgas who are represented as having a human upper body and a snake lower body, with a hood-covered head. The use of a bird's body as a temporary residence for the soul – itself identified as a bird, i.e the gander (*haṃsa*) – is a recurring theme in many Indian tales.

From an entry in Khaparde's diary dated 27 February 1912, we know that Sai Baba loved to gaze at parrots: he admired their beautiful colors which

**88** On these issues, see Olivelle, "The Beast and the Ascetic", 91-100.

**89** *Yogīnī*s in particular are shape changers (*kāmarūpinī*s), often represented as bird-headed women. The Bengali saint Ramakrishna once said that through the *guru*'s grace he was transmuted into a stone and a fish; see Gupta, *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 315.

he contemplated as a specimen of Allāh's wondrous creation.[90] In Sufism as well as in Kabīr poetry, the parrot is used as a symbol of the soul that frees itself from the cage of the body and flies up in the vast expanse of the sky. Even in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 17, vv. 124, 127) we read:

> You must remind yourself that you are yourself the pure *Brahman*, held captive by your association with the physical body – like the parrot that holds fast to the perch in the cage, with his feet and suspends himself, head downwards. […] Free your feet from the bondage, O parrot! You can then soar high up in the sky![91]

Thus it could be suggested that the saint's adoption of the parrot's shape was intended to highlight his spiritual freedom.[92] Yet, the parrot is symbolically ambivalent: while there are tales that magnify his compassion and cleverness,[93] there are others that criticize his dullness and attachment.[94] Even in Hindu myths, the parrot (*śuka*) is taken as the representative of a variety of conflicting, even opposite characteristics: wisdom and detachment as well as ignorance and lust.[95]

The fact that he was oblivious of himself and lost "one lakh of rupees", i.e., one hundred thousand rupees, seems to imply that, being entirely on another plane for a whole year, not only his ordinary life was disrupted but he also experienced a huge spiritual loss, given that herein rupees probably allude to spiritual wealth.[96] It should be noted that the reference to one hundred thousand rupees could be reminiscent of a popular tale of Mahadevprasad Singh titled *Bhairavānand Yogī*. Herein, a king who is transformed into a parrot by his powerful *guru* has the ability to name its own price, i.e., one hundred thousand rupees.[97]

The fact that Sai Baba "desired" to become a parrot could be interpreted as a weakness of his and that he was prone to lust (*kāma*), especially given the detail that he exchanged "the *lower* part of his body for that of a parrot", which may be taken as a reference to the sexual sphere. It must be

**90** Sai Baba taught that one should look at God's creation appreciating its sheer beauty. In this vein, he once told Nanasaheb Chandorkar that, as long as the mind is pure, i.e., with no sensual craving, it is perfectly fine to contemplate a woman's physical beauty: "[E]yes do their work of seeing. Then why be embarrassed?"; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 808-11 (chap. 49, vv. 148-83).

**91** Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 278-9. On the similarity between the *jīvātman* and the parrot, see *ibid.*, 373 (chap. 23, vv. 23-30).

**92** In his *Granthāvali*, *pada* 97, Kabīr speaks of the "free parrot of his heart" that must guard itself from *māyā*, illusion, represented as a clever, invisible cat; see Mishra, *Mistici indiani medievali*, 371.

**93** See for instance the popular tale of the merchant and the parrot; see `http://www.dar-al-masnavi.org/n-I-1547.html`.

**94** In one of Kabīr's songs, the parrot represents those who are caught in the ties of worldly existence; see Lorenzen, *Praises*, 218-19.

**95** One is reminded of the *Śukasaptati*, the "Seventy Tales of the Parrot", a celebrated anonymous collection of stories about sensual love (*kāma*) and adultery. Many of these stories came to be known in the West via Persian translations. On the symbolism of the parrot, see Doniger, "Echoes of the *Mahābhārata*", 31-57.

**96** B.V. Narasimhaswami glosses a lakh of rupees by adding within parenthesis "*lakṣa* i.e., *lakṣya*, aim", with no further comments; Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 275.

**97** On this tale and its literary sources in the 'Vikrama cycle', see White, *Sinister Yogis*, 1-37.

remembered that in Hindu myth and iconography the parrot is the vehicle of Kāma, the god of erotic love.

His words that "he began sitting near a post", possibly after having regained his normal condition, may be interpreted to mean that he lived practicing meditative exercises near a sacrificial post (*yūpa*). It being a place of sacrifice, he may be identified as the sacrificial victim *par excellence* whose life, i.e., whose ego, is willingly renounced. The "great serpent" could well symbolize the divine Nāga, embodying sacrifice as rebirth from death: reemerging from its aged skin, it is the remainder of itself. Such residue is the essence of sacrifice being the seed of life's renewal. As mentioned, the Nāga is one of the most potent theromorphic figures. One may interpret Sai Baba's words as implying that he got metamorphosed a second time, i.e., that he "woke up" as a wrathful, divine snake: his transformation from semi-parrot to Nāga may then allude to the achievement of spiritual excellence. The "very angry" snake could be taken as a symbol of the raw energy of *kuṇḍalinī* (lit. 'the coiled one') that, once awakened by Sai Baba through his meditative exercises, exhibits its wild, intense dynamism "jumping up and also falling from above".[98] It may be inferred that the *faqīr* was able to control it and direct it upwards along the central channel of the spinal column (*suṣumnānāḍī*), having it merge with the unlimited power of the thousand-petalled lotus (*sahasrārapadma*) at the crown of the head.[99]

Along these lines, a plausible interpretation is put forward by Ekkirala Bharadwaja. His idea is that the *faqīr* was prey to lust, symbolized by the parrot, as a consequence of which he forgot his true identity and lost his money, i.e., his spiritual power. Subsequently, through his yogic practice – the post or pillar being symbolic of the spine and of the power of *kuṇḍalinī* – he was able to subdue all lustful tendencies and achieve the highest spiritual state:

> Parrot is proverbial for lust. Baba exchanging the nether half of his body with its body indicates that he had succumbed to the demands of the flesh. The lakhs of rupees he had lost indicates that he had lost all the spiritual power he had accumulated by earlier *sadhana*.[100] The pillar stands for the spine and sitting at its foot symbolizes meditating on the base of the spine or *muladhara*. The jumping snake is the awakened *kundalini* or the 'serpent power'.[101]

**98** On *kuṇḍalinī*, see Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*.

**99** For another parable in which a huge serpent plays a major role, see Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 32-4. There appear to be significant parallels between the Sufi practice of *dhikr*, the remembrance of Allāh's names, and *kuṇḍalinīyoga*; see Ventura, *Sapienza sufi*, 28 ff. By the same author, see also *Lo yoga dell'Islam*. Even if Sai Baba was not an adept of Tantric Yoga, he must nevertheless have been familiar with yogic terminology and symbolism and in his integrative saintliness was probably exposed to its techniques. On these issues, see Rigopoulos, "Sāī Bābā and Yoga Powers", 381-426. On the other hand, one needs to be aware of the wide array of symbolic meanings of the jumping snake. In an episode dated 1904, we read: "He [= Shri Krishna Purshotam Patil] had *darshan* and performed *puja* and sat before Baba. Looking at him Baba said, '*Arre*. When a severe blow knocks his teeth into his throat, then we will see how that wicked snake jumps about'. This is a Marāṭhī saying that when roughly translated means, '*Arre*. Why do you worry? You have done no harm to others, so God will do no harm to you. God will bless you with abundance. I will watch how long the wicked folk strut about'" (Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 57).

**100** A spiritual method or practice.

**101** Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, 91; `http://saiamrithadhara.com/docs/Sai%20Baba%20The%20Master.pdf.pdf`.

Khaparde writes that Sai Baba then "changed the subject" and told what appeared to be another story. The *faqīr*, who again figures as protagonist, narrates that he once visited an unspecified place and that the *pāṭīl*, i.e., the village headman, "would not let him go unless he made a plantation and had a footpath through it". He obeyed the *pāṭīl*'s request and did both. Though this could well be a reminiscence of a real episode of his life before arriving in Shirdi, it irresistibly lends itself to a symbolic interpretation: the *pāṭīl* who is the owner of the land may be taken to represent God and the plantation may stand for his 'vineyard', i.e., the field (*kṣetra*) which Sai Baba – God's officer – prepares for the workers, i.e., God's people/the saint's *bhakta*s, to cultivate in order to achieve salvation.[102] The plantation/'garden' prepared by Sai Baba could also be representative of the ultimate abode, i.e., paradise/*mokṣa*, towards which he, the master, guides his devotees. Along these lines, the footpath would correspond to the *pīr*[103] or *guru*'s spiritual path (*ṭarīq/mārga*), which all must follow in order to reach the ultimate goal. Bharadwaja's interpretation follows along these lines:

> God is the land-lord or Patil. Raising the plantation signifies the foundation of a spiritual centre. The foot-path stands for the spiritual path which Baba had to lay for his devotees. The parable indicates that God has ordered Baba to play the role of a *guru*. It is interesting to note that Baba did raise a garden at the spot where now stands the Samadhi Mandir which is the beacon light to innumerable spiritual seekers.[104]

To a man who had just arrived at the *masjid*, Sai Baba revealed that he had been a Rohilla in his past life, that he was looted by other Rohillas and had later, i.e., presently, become a Bania. To a woman, evidently the man's wife, he said that "she had nobody but him to look after her", his special care for her being due to the fact that she was "a relation of his" from her past life, thus highlighting the special karmic tie that bound him to her. The *faqīr* pointed out how in her previous life she had been married to the Rohillas who had looted the one who had now become her husband, implicitly revealing that she had also been a Rohilla, i.e., a Muslim. In this way, the couple and all people present at the mosque could appreciate the workings of *karma*, the invisible ties that bound one person to the other birth after birth. In particular, what Sai Baba wished to point out is the justice of karmic retribution: the Rohilla who had been looted had now become a Bania, i.e., a wealthy trader and moneylender, and the woman that had been the wife of the evil Rohillas who had looted him had now become his wife. The fact that this couple was Hindu – the Bania being a Hindu caste – whereas in their previous life they had been Rohillas, i.e., Muslims, is in itself a lesson against the ideological barriers of communalism since in this way Sai Baba highlighted the interchangeability of one's caste and religion. Indeed, for him, caste and religious affiliation were mere labels; what truly mattered

**102** I am reminded of a story told by saint Ramakrishna on 22 December 1883, relative to an infinite field (= *Brahman*) beyond a high wall (= the wall of separateness, which prevents us from realizing *Brahman*); see Gupta, *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 393. Once one climbs the wall and sees the field, one attains the "knowledge of *Brahman*" (*brahmajñāna*) and eventually 'drops in' the field and becomes one with it.

**103** Lit. 'elder'; a Muslim saint and master in the Sufi tradition.

**104** Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, 91.

was the human person's goodness and their well-being along their karmic trajectory. Interestingly, the *Shri Sai Satcharita* reports that Sai Baba was fond of a hot-tempered Rohilla who stayed in Shirdi for some time and had the habit of reciting verses from the *Quran* at the top of his voice, for which reason the villagers disliked him.[105]

As he did on the previous day, Sai Baba complains about the world and the people having generally turned bad, being prone to unbelief and to evil thoughts and deeds, i.e., not being "pious and trustful" as they used to be in the past. Noteworthy is the *faqīr*'s mention of his father and grandfather and his saying that he "became the one and the other alternatively", though unfortunately Khaparde could not catch Sai Baba's complete utterance. This again points to his metamorphic ability and the idea that he is not confined to a single, fixed identity. By defying linear logic, the paradox of alternating roles between father and grandfather captures the saint's teaching on souls exchanging identities. In doing so, he highlights his true nature – one that exists beyond birth and death, remaining the same in all beings.

Interesting is Khaparde's annotation that a "little noise" prompted Sai Baba's anger, "who looked at me with an eye that blazed wonderfully". The saint didn't like people to uselessly chat and wished that everyone be silent, especially in his presence. The light in his eyes, his powerful gaze, were part and parcel of his magnetic charisma. The fact that the *faqīr* "changed the mood completely" as soon as he was told that the noise was caused by the "children talking with each other", shows his benevolent attitude toward the youth. The immediacy with which he changed his mood was a characteristic of his unpredictable personality.

The circumstance that Sai Baba was seen "talking all through to Haribhau Dixit" is not surprising since Dixit – who had brought the fruits that the saint ate and distributed – was among his prominent *bhakta*s, whom Sai Baba loved dearly. One might speculate that since the construction of the Dixit *vāḍā* had just begun the *faqīr* wanted to discuss it with him.

> Shirdi, Monday 12 December 1910
>
> In the morning after prayer *we saw Sayin Maharaj passing out as usual* and then sat talking among ourselves as usual. Mr. Dixit appears to have turned a new leaf altogether and spends a good deal of his time in prayer and his temper, which was always mild, appears to have acquired the peculiar sweetness which is entirely due to internal calm. Rao Bahadur Rajarampant Dixit came soon after from Pulgaon. He said he had no intention to visit Shirdi when he left Nagpur, but somehow, at Pulgaon, he made up his mind to the visit very suddenly and made the journey practically on the spur of the moment. I was very glad to see him.
> *We all went to see Sayin Saheb later on. I was a bit late and missed a very interesting story told by him.* ***He teaches in parables. It was about a man having a very beautiful horse, which, do what he could, would not go in pair. It was taken all round and given all the usual training, to no purpose. At last a widwan*** [= a wise man, a sage] ***suggested***

**105** See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 45-8 (chap. 3, vv. 109-41). Herein, Sai Baba speaks of the Rohilla's wife who is symbolic of lust and the power of illusion, *māyā*. On this episode, see Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 93-4.

> ***its being taken to the place from which it was originally brought. This was done and then the horse went all right in the harness and became very useful. I heard the fag end of the parable.***
> *Then he enquired when I was going.* I replied that I would go when he gave me permission of his own accord to go. *He replied: "You go today after taking your meals", and later on sent curds by the hand of Madhavrao Deshpande, as prasad to me.* I had it at meals, and *soon after I went to Sayin Saheb. He confirmed his permission to go as soon as I went.* My son did not feel sure of the permission and so asked expressly and *the permission was given in clear words.*[106] *The Sayin Maharaj today asked Dakshina of others but nothing of me or my son. I was very low in funds and he appeared to know it.* After saying goodbye to Mr. Nulkar, Mr. Dixit, Mr. Bapusaheb Jog, Babasaheb Sahasrabuddhe, Madhavrao Deshpande, Balasaheb Bhate, Wasudeorao and others we left with Patwardhan, Pradhan, Kaka Mahajani, Mr. Tarkhad and Mr. Bhide who came today. We caught the train about 6:30 PM at Kopargaon and travelled to Manmad, Mr. Bhide getting down at Yeola. I and my son will soon leave Manmad by the Punjab Mail. Last night I dreamt that I saw Uzizuddin and another whom I could not recognize.

Khaparde proves to be a careful observer: as on 7 December he had noted Balasaheb Bhate's "peculiar kind of calm on his face", here he points out Dixit's "peculiar sweetness which is entirely due to internal calm", the latter "spending a good deal of his time in prayer". These were the effects of their devotion and proximity to Sai Baba, and Khaparde looked at them with admiration, probably hoping that he too could progress along the spiritual path and attain such enviable peace of mind.

The diarist's remark that the saint "teaches in parables" is most significant since it confirms what all the sources tell us. This was the direct experience of both Khaparde and his son even after a few days of being in Sai Baba's presence. He was well aware that the *faqīr*'s habit of telling stories was designed to teach some truth and moral instruction, typically indirectly by the use of comparisons. Unfortunately, in this case he heard only the last part of the parable since he arrived at the mosque "a bit late", which taught him a lesson on the importance of being on time. Khaparde's tentative summary – which he must have learned from his son[107] – shows it to be an allegory given its metaphoric character prolonged into a continuous narrative. Herein, every detail is symbolic and has a precise meaning which must be discovered. A possible interpretation of this story – constitutively open to plural readings – is that the "very beautiful horse that would not go in pair" symbolizes the uncontrolled mind and senses (*indriya*s) of man. The person owning it, who unsuccessfully tries to discipline it "taking it all round and giving it all the usual training", identifies someone who has realized

**106** In the *Shri Sai Satcharita* we read: "Shri Dadasaheb Khaparde had come to Shirdi alone, much earlier [than H.S. Dixit], and was in some difficulty over getting Baba's permission to return home. Both of them got Baba's permission – Khaparde to go home, and Dixit to lay the foundation stone of the building [= the Dixit *vāḍā*], on the 10th of December [1910]"; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 69-70 (chap. 4, vv. 163-4).

**107** Most probably, this was the story Sai Baba had promised to tell Khaparde's son, Balkrishna, following his assurance on 7 December that "he would tell another when he was in the humor".

the need of bringing the mind and senses in check but, despite all his/her efforts, is unable to subdue one's 'horse'. The reason for such failure is that man, by himself, is not capable of taming the mind. One needs the guidance and grace of the *vidvān* who is none other than the *guru*, who resolves the situation by offering the right advice: the horse, i.e., one's 'monkey mind', must be "taken to the place from which it was originally brought", i.e., drawn back to its place of origin which is God, man's true abode. Only the *guru* can show the way, the spiritual path that leads man back home. This resonates with the "native town" hinted at by Sai Baba a week earlier. On 5 December, during their first meeting, the saint had remarked that he would not find peace until he returned to his "native town" – a clear reference to returning to Allāh by 'leaving the body'. When one finds one's way back to the source, he/she is reintegrated in God's embrace, becomes pacified and attains bliss. And when this happens, "the horse is all right in the harness". The moral of the story is that human beings can find fulfillment in God alone: one's existence "becomes very useful" only when it is lived in communion with the lord, in the constant remembrance of him.[108] It is a pity that Khaparde could give us only a short summary of this "very interesting story" which must have been rich in details.

Finally, Sai Baba took the initiative and repeatedly told Khaparde and his son Balkrishna that they had permission to go and that they should leave Shirdi today in the afternoon, after taking their meals. Through Madhavrao Deshpande he sent them some curds as *prasād*, i.e., as a token of his grace. It is noteworthy that he did not ask any *dakṣiṇā* of Khaparde and his son. Evidently he intuitively knew, as Khaparde writes, that he was "very low in funds". Thus, on their way back, they had to travel second class instead of the usual first class. And when Khaparde reached Amravati on 19 December, it is recorded that he had to walk from the railway station to his residence, since he had no money even to hire a vehicle.

All in all, during his week in Shirdi, Khaparde recorded ten stories and sayings of Sai Baba: six are plainly autobiographical (from 7, 10 and 11 December, with at least three referring to his past lives); two are parables or allegories (7 and 12 December); and two refer to the previous lives of his devotees, revealing his *antarajñāna* (10 and 11 December; these are also autobiographical).

**108** Bharadwaja's comments are along the same lines: "The horse stands for mind which is difficult to harness and unite with a chosen object of meditation. Taking it to its original place signifies investigating the source of mind when it naturally gets stilled"; Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, 92.