4 G.S. Khaparde's Third Visit to Shirdi
29-31 December 1915

As soon as he returned home, Khaparde resumed his legal practice, rapidly recovering a substantial number of clients, and once again became deeply immersed in political activity. By this time, the danger of professional obstruction, prosecution, or arrest had considerably diminished. The improvement in his situation may be inferred from an entry in his diary dated 1 April 1912:

> Then Major Morris told me that he had many talks with Mr. Craddock about me and he told him his opinion and Mr. Craddock admitted his mistake in removing my name from Municipal membership etc. etc. during my absence and without an explanation. […] He said he did not agree with my political opinions, but that had nothing to do with my professional work. He said he recommended my prosecution over the Hoshangabad speech that I made but Mr. Craddock did not see eye to eye with him. Later on, Mr. Craddock found that he had no handle against me.[1]

Between 1912 and 1915, the political atmosphere became noticeably less tense, and conditions improved further following Tilak's release from prison in June 1914. Internationally, however, the situation was rapidly deteriorating. Only a month later, on 28 July 1914, the First World War broke out. As part of the British Empire, India became directly involved

1 Kunte, *Source Material*, 393.

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in the conflict: more than one million Indian soldiers served overseas, and over 60,000 lost their lives before the war ended on 11 November 1918.[2]

Khaparde's memoirs reveal that one of the principal political concerns during 1915 was whether a reconciliation should be pursued between the Nationalists and the Moderates, thereby healing the long-standing division within the Indian National Congress.[3] In particular, between October and December 1915, Khaparde and Tilak were actively engaged in assessing the prospects of establishing a Home Rule League, which Tilak would formally inaugurate at Belgaum in April 1916. Khaparde's diary also documents the involvement of Annie Besant, leader of the Theosophical Society, who would herself launch a Home Rule League in Madras in September 1916. In his entries of 12 and 13 October 1915, written while he was in Nagpur, Khaparde records:

> Mrs. Besant […] came by Calcutta Mail and sent a word that I and my friends should meet her tomorrow at 9 AM in the Theosophical Hall […]. I […] drove to Vyankatesh Theatre for Mrs. Besant lecture […] Mrs. Besant spoke with wonderful eloquence on India after the War. […]
>
> [D]rove to the Vyankatesh Theatre for the lecture of Mrs. Besant on the use of Theosophy to India. There was a large audience but most of the Moderates were conspicuous by their absence. […] Mrs. Besant spoke with her usual eloquence. […] After the lecture I drove to our Theosophical Hall in Sitabardi […]. Mrs. Besant was there before us. […] We sat talking with Mrs. Besant about the proposed Home Rule League. She said it would have an organization of loose kind, and societies already existing would be invited to affiliate. It would be independent of the Congress and both the Indian parties would be at liberty to join. In fact, she desired that both should join.[4]

On 24 December 1915, immediately before the Bombay Congress Session held from 27 to 29 December, Khaparde emerged as one of the principal figures at the Nationalist Conference convened in Pune, over which he was elected President. On the previous day, he had attended a meeting devoted to discussing the proposed Home Rule League for India, during which a draft resolution was prepared. In his diary entry for 24 December, he writes:

> So many people arrived that it is not practicable to mention them. For breakfast we went to a Wada near Vishram Bagh. Our camp is established there. Nearly two hundred Nationalists have assembled. […] [L]ater on went with Tilak to Sarvajanik Sabha Hall for our Conference. It was crowded. I was elected President. The proceedings were very smooth and pleasant. We passed the necessary resolutions.[5]

2 Meher Baba once stated that it was Sai Baba who controlled the First World War, "though he seemed to be doing nothing, sitting in an out-of-the-way place, Shirdi, […] unknown to the world at large"; Purdom, *The Perfect Master*, 108. Sai Baba is also believed to have rescued Captain Jahangir Framji Daruwalla during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05; see Subhasree, Renuka, "Shirdi Sai Baba Rescues Daruwalla": 37-8.

3 See Kunte, *Source Material*, 397-8.

4 Kunte, *Source Material*, 398-9.

5 Kunte, *Source Material*, 399.

The most significant outcome of the Bombay Congress Session, presided over by Satyendra Prasanna Sinha, was the amendment of the Congress Constitution in a manner that permitted the readmission of the Nationalist delegates. Tilak responded by publicly declaring the willingness of his followers to rejoin the Congress. Consequently, the number of delegates increased dramatically, rising to 2,259 from only 866 the previous year. The Nationalists' position had also been strengthened by the deaths, during 1915, of two leading Moderate figures: Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Tilak's most formidable intellectual opponent, who died on 19 February, and Pherozeshah Mehta, one of the staunchest leaders of the Moderate faction, who passed away on 5 November.

Amid these momentous political developments, Khaparde felt a strong inner urge to visit Sai Baba and seek his blessings. His wife and sons were already staying in Shirdi. He first travelled to Thane to visit his friend Baba Gupte and then proceeded to Shirdi via Manmad and Kopargaon, arriving at approximately 9 AM on 29 December after an overnight journey. The following are the diary entries describing the three days he spent in the immediate presence of Sai Baba.

> Shirdi, Wednesday 29 December 1915
>
> I was awakened about 3:30 AM at Manmad and put into the train for Kopargaon. I prayed in the train and on getting down at Kopargaon before day break met Dr. Deshpande who is in charge at the Dispensary at Kopargaon. I did not know him before. I gave him and his son a lift up to his Dispensary and he gave me a hot cup of tea and something to eat. There was a great mist and I drove in it to Shirdi reaching it about 9 AM. My wife and children were there.
> I went to the Masjid with Madhavrao Deshpande and *made my Namaskar to Sayin Maharaj. His health is very poor. He is much bothered by cough*.
> I got the morchal at Puja. The day here passes very easy. G.M. Buti alias Bapusaheb is here with his master and Gurvashta.[6] Kakasaheb Dixit, Bapusaheb Jog, Balasaheb Bhate and all old friends are here, and I am exceedingly happy.

Because of the "great mist", that is, the poor visibility, Khaparde's morning journey from Kopargaon to Shirdi – presumably by *tāṅgā* – was somewhat hazardous. Nevertheless, he arrived safely, reunited with his wife and sons who had preceded him to Shirdi, and immediately proceeded to the mosque to prostrate himself at the feet of his lord. Khaparde evidently wished to express his gratitude to his *guru* and deity for the protection he believed he had continuously received. As was customary, Madhavrao Deshpande accompanied him to the *masjid*.

Significantly, the diarist's first observation concerns Sai Baba's physical condition: he notes that the saint's health was "very poor" and that he was

6 Gopalrao Mukund Buti's master was none other than Sai Baba himself, with whom he had the privilege of spending many hours each day. The expression *gurvaṣṭa* suggests that the *guru* constituted everything for him, the numeral *aṣṭa* ('eight') symbolizing completeness or fullness. As the refrain of the celebrated *Gurvaṣṭaka* ('Eight Verses in Praise of the *Guru*'), traditionally attributed to Śaṅkara, declares: "But if one's mind be not attached to the lotus feet of the *guru*, what then, what then, what then, what then?" (*manaś cen na lagnaṃ guror aṅghri-padme tataḥ kiṃ tataḥ kiṃ tataḥ kiṃ tataḥ kiṃ tataḥ kim*).

"much bothered by cough". Khaparde must have been deeply distressed to find him in such a weakened state, even though the *faqīr* endured his ailments with characteristic stoicism. Nearly four years had elapsed since Khaparde's previous stay in Shirdi, and Sai Baba's health had evidently deteriorated considerably during the intervening period. One can readily imagine the devotee's sadness and helplessness as he witnessed his master's coughing fits, most likely caused by chronic asthma.

Khaparde further records that he was granted the privilege of holding the peacock fan during the congregational worship of Sai Baba. He also remarks that "the day here passes very easy", a brief but revealing statement that alludes to the spiritual rhythm of life in Shirdi, which he cherished so deeply, as well as to the joy of once again being surrounded by old and beloved companions. Given the diarist's generally restrained and sober style, his concluding remark that he was "exceedingly happy" is particularly noteworthy.

It is evident that Khaparde felt a profound inner urge to return to Shirdi and behold Sai Baba once more, despite his demanding political commitments and the simultaneous proceedings of the Bombay Congress Session. For him, returning to Shirdi must have resembled a homecoming to his true spiritual abode, as Sai Baba himself had often intimated. What greater blessing could there have been than to conclude the year in the saint's presence? From a theological perspective, one may argue that it was Sai Baba himself who once again drew his devotee back to Shirdi, for the call of the *guru* is irresistible to the *śiṣya*.

> Shirdi, Thursday 30 December 1915
>
> I got up as usual in the morning, prayed and sat talking with one Karnik who turned out to be related to the late Amrit Rao Abaji.
> I sat talking with Fakir Baba who has advanced wonderfully and appears to be on the point of being permanently admitted to the spiritual hierarchy. I sat talking with him.
> *Sayin Maharaj is getting slightly better*. I did the Naivedya and Puja today.
> There were about a hundred people invited to breakfast, which was very late. In fact, we finished about 4 PM.
> Madhavrao Deshpande was as usual very useful.
> Bapu Saheb Buti's Wada is progressing beautifully. It is a stone building and very strong and very convenient for occupation.
> There was Chavadi [procession] today and I attended it with Morchal.
> Ayisaheb is also unwell.
> Mr. P. Hate went today to Kalyan as his son in law is said to be unwell. *Sayin Baba gave him a full coconut*. So I think the young man will recover.

Khaparde's reference to Fakir Baba, who "has advanced wonderfully and appears to be on the point of being permanently admitted to the spiritual hierarchy", indicates the high esteem in which Sai Baba held him. Fakir Baba apparently had a place reserved for him to Sai Baba's right on the raised platform inside the mosque. Every day he would take his meals with the saint, who personally served him food with his own hands and waited

for him to finish eating before partaking of his own meal. The diarist's remark that he "sat talking with him" is equally significant, for it confirms that Khaparde harbored no prejudice against Muslims and entertained no fear of ritual pollution. The spirit of Hindu-Muslim harmony fostered by Sai Baba was something to which Khaparde wholeheartedly subscribed.

Khaparde must also have felt relieved to observe that "Sayin Maharaj is getting slightly better". During the morning, he was granted the privilege of offering food (*naivedya*) and performing individual worship (*pūjā*) for the saint. His note that there were "a hundred people invited to breakfast, which was very late" illustrates how Shirdi had by then developed into a bustling center of pilgrimage. From a logistical standpoint, arranging meals for such a large gathering must have posed a considerable challenge for Madhavrao Deshpande and the local devotees.

The diarist further observes that "Buti's Wada is progressing beautifully"; indeed, such a structure had become urgently necessary in view of the constant influx of visitors to Shirdi. No one at the time could have imagined that this "stone building […] very strong and very convenient for occupation" would eventually become Sai Baba's tomb, namely the Samādhi Mandir.



Figure 44 The Samādhi Mandir in the 1920s

In the evening, during the *cāvaḍī* procession, Khaparde was once again accorded the honor of holding the peacock fan. As already noted, this service was deeply cherished by all devotees, and even a prominent public figure such as Khaparde regarded it as a privilege, for it enabled him to remain in close proximity to the saint.

In concluding his entry, the diarist mentions that several individuals were unwell, particularly the son-in-law of a certain Mr. Hate of Kalyan. Especially noteworthy is Khaparde's observation that, since "Sayin Baba gave him [i.e., Mr. Hate] a full coconut" shortly before his departure for Kalyan, the young man was destined to recover. Among Sai Baba's devotees, it was widely believed that when the saint offered a fruit such as a coconut or mango as *prasād*, this constituted a special blessing and signified that the recipient's wish or prayer would ultimately be fulfilled.

> Shirdi - Bhusawal, Friday 31 December 1915
>
> I wished to go to Masjid for Kakad Arti but felt disinclined at the last moment and did not go.
> After morning prayer, when I was going to the Masjid, Rao Bahadur Sathe got hold of me and took me to his Madi.[7]
> There some eight gentlemen assembled and told me about the arrangements they wished to make for the Samsthan of Sayin Baba. They have a good scheme and I made the suggestion that they should make no endeavor to collect monies from those whom Sayin Baba gave them. They approved of my advice. All this took time and we were late for Arti, but we went in time and I had the chavari or rather the mayur piccha.[8]
> After food, *I went with Madhavrao Deshpande* [*to Sayin Baba*] *and got permission without any difficulty for returning*. My wife, Manu Tai, Uma and children will remain behind.
> In the compound of the Masjid, I met Wassudeorao Dada Piriplekar of Malkapur and Mr. Bhagavat, Executive Enquirer of Kopargaon.
> I made ready and left by Balabhau's Tonga, reached Kopargaon and had a talk with the station master. His assistant was at one time at Amravati. I got into the 6:30 PM train, reached Manmad, and got into the passenger [train] that leaves at 8:30 PM. I had a compartment all the way to myself and reached Bhusawal about 4 AM and put up in the waiting room.

Given the high esteem in which Khaparde was held by the devotees, he was, on the morning of that day, almost compelled by the eminent devotee Rao Bahadur Hari Vinayak Sathe to participate in an important meeting convened at the Sathe *vāḍā* concerning the establishment of a Saṃsthān, that is, an organized administrative body for the management of Shirdi as a place of pilgrimage. It had in fact been Sai Baba himself who, in December 1915, requested Sathe to help regulate a situation that was becoming increasingly difficult to manage because of the growing influx of visitors and the inappropriate conduct of certain individuals. As Sai Baba reportedly told Sathe: "You can very well see, Saheb, that these people are troubling me. Make some arrangement to sort this out, Saheb".[9]

As Chandra Bhanu Satpathy observes:

> Credit goes to Sathe for institutionalizing the management of Shirdi pertaining to Shirdi Sai's affairs. […] [H]e created Dakshina Bhiksha Sanstha in 1915 at the behest of Baba to control the misutilization of the money donated to Baba and for better management of the environment around Baba. […] [T]he DBS was the precursor of the Shri Saibaba Sansthan Trust which was formed in 1922.[10]

7 An upper floor located within the Sathe *vāḍā*.

8 A ceremonial fan made of peacock feathers.

9 Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 246-7.

10 Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 103. See also *ibid.*, 239-56. Rao Bahadur Hari Vinayak Sathe also initiated the publication of the first periodical dedicated to Sai Baba, the *Shri Sainathprabha*, which served as the precursor to the *Shri Sai Leela*, launched in 1923.

Khaparde recognized the significance of Sathe's initiative and notes in his diary that Sathe and his associates had devised a "good scheme". His own recommendation, namely "to make no endeavor to collect monies from those whom Sayin Baba gave them", was approved during the discussions. Nevertheless, we know that the Dakshina Bhiksha Sanstha (DBS) eventually resolved that all those who received money from Sai Baba should contribute a certain percentage – approximately ten per cent – to the organization. These funds were intended to meet the saint's daily requirements, including food, tobacco, oil, and related expenses.[11] The measure, however, soon became the object of criticism and ultimately proved unsuccessful, thereby confirming the soundness of Khaparde's advice. Even Fakir Baba, who had benefited most extensively from Sai Baba's generosity, refused to make any contribution.

Although the meeting, with Sathe and "some eight gentlemen" in attendance, lasted for a considerable time, Khaparde nevertheless succeeded in reaching the *masjid* for the midday *ārtī*, during which he once again enjoyed the privilege of serving Sai Baba by holding the ceremonial fan. Accompanied, as usual, by Madhavrao Deshpande, he returned to the mosque after lunch in order to seek the saint's permission to depart for Amravati. Sai Baba granted permission immediately. Khaparde must have interpreted this prompt authorization as a reassuring sign that circumstances had indeed changed decisively and that he was no longer in danger of prosecution or arrest.

11 See Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 250.