5 G.S. Khaparde's Fourth Visit to Shirdi Along with Bal Gangadhar Tilak
19 May 1917

For Khaparde, the year 1916 was marked by intense political activity and significant achievements. In April, he presided over the Bombay Provincial Conference, attended by more than 1,650 delegates, at which the establishment of a Home Rule League was formally resolved upon. Together with Tilak,[1] he subsequently toured extensively throughout Maharashtra, delivering numerous public speeches. In May, Tilak confided to him that Mrs. Besant would most likely align herself with the Nationalists, and in June, during the Shivaji celebrations held in Pune, Tilak openly declared that Muslim fears of ill-treatment in the event of Indian independence were entirely unfounded. It should also be noted that on 9 November 1916 Tilak was charged with sedition for the third time because of his speeches advocating self-rule; on this occasion, however, he was acquitted. In November, Khaparde was occupied with yet another Provincial Conference, during which he was acclaimed as the foremost Maharashtrian leader after Tilak himself.

Most importantly, at the end of December 1916 the Indian National Congress convened at Lucknow, where several major agreements were reached. Chief among them was the so-called Lucknow Pact, an accord concluded between the Congress, represented by Tilak, and the All-India Muslim League, represented by Mohammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), who had joined the League

1 For a collection of Khaparde's diary entries concerning Tilak from 1916 until the latter's death in 1920, see Bapat, *Reminiscences of Lokamanya Tilak*, 73-100.

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in 1913.[2] The two organizations agreed to provide representation for religious minorities in the provincial legislatures. Furthermore, the Muslim League consented to cooperate with the Congress in demanding Indian autonomy. At this time, Jinnah belonged simultaneously to both the Congress and the Muslim League, was closely associated with Tilak, and was widely hailed as an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity.[3] The Lucknow Pact came to be regarded as a beacon of hope for Hindu-Muslim integration. For the first time, Hindus and Muslims jointly articulated a demand for political reform, thereby strengthening the conviction that Home Rule was genuinely attainable. The Pact not only established cordial relations between the Muslim League and the Congress but also fostered constructive cooperation between the two principal factions within the Congress itself, namely the Nationalists and the Moderates. Significantly, it was further resolved that a united Home Rule campaign should be organized with the participation of all Congress leaders.

Benefiting from this favorable political climate of unity and cooperation, Khaparde entered a period of intense activity during the opening months of 1917. On 3-4 January, he and Tilak met Mrs. Besant at the Theosophical Lodge in Calcutta to discuss plans for the Home Rule campaign, and it was decided that the movement should be launched in Calcutta within two or three weeks. At the numerous rallies addressed by Khaparde, especially throughout Maharashtra, enormous crowds assembled and acclaimed him as their champion.

Such developments naturally caused considerable anxiety among the British authorities. It is therefore unsurprising that Khaparde repeatedly mentions in his diary the surveillance to which he was subjected by detectives and informers. Thus we read: "There were three detectives at the Railway Station" (Calcutta, 3 January 1917); "I suspected the story and thought the man a spy…" (Badnera, 7 March 1917); "[T]he Badnera Police secretly reported against him [= Mr. Callaghan] and Labhasing charging them with being friendly with me and for having shown great respect to Lokamanya Tilak" (Amravati-Nagpur, 22 April 1917); and "A detective came there and I soon made him out" (Bhusawal, 10 May 1917).[4]

It is noteworthy that when Khaparde and Tilak arrived at the Nagpur railway station on 6 January 1917, they found Gopalrao Mukund Buti, the wealthy devotee of Sai Baba, waiting to receive them:[5]

2 The All-India Muslim League was founded in 1906. It should be noted that Jinnah, himself a barrister, was retained by Tilak in 1908 to secure his release on bail after his arrest on charges of sedition. The application was unsuccessful, and Tilak, who defended himself at trial, was sentenced to six years' transportation in Mandalay, Burma. Jinnah later acted as Tilak's counsel in 1916, when Tilak was prosecuted for sedition in connection with his speeches on self-rule and was acquitted.

3 Jinnah subsequently became a prominent leader of the All-India Home Rule League and, in 1929, formulated his famous Fourteen Points, a constitutional proposal intended to safeguard the political rights of Indian Muslims. In 1920, he resigned from the Congress after it adopted Gandhi's program of *satyāgraha*, which he regarded as tantamount to political anarchy. The Non-Cooperation Movement was launched under Gandhi's leadership on 1 August 1920, the very day of Tilak's death, and was formally endorsed by the Congress at its special session in Calcutta the following month.

4 Kunte, *Source Material*, 407-11.

5 Khaparde maintained an account with Buti's firm in Nagpur; see Kunte, *Source Material*, 489.

> Reached Nagpur about 1 PM. The crowd at the Railway Station was tremendous and it was difficult to get down from the carriage. […] Somehow I and Tilak got out, and with great difficulty got into the carriage of Gopal Rao Buti. […] The procession began. They selected a wrong route. It was very dusty and very long. We had to be in blazing sun for over two hours […] and I got fever.[6]

At this juncture, the enthusiasm surrounding Tilak throughout Maharashtra and indeed the entire country was extraordinary. Thus, when Khaparde accompanied him by train from Nagpur to Calcutta on 6-7 April 1917 in preparation for the All India Congress Committee meeting, mass demonstrations in Tilak's honor took place at virtually every railway station. On the return journey between Nagpur and Akola, on 10 April, Khaparde records: "We were awakened often at night by people wishing to see Lokamanya and at Bilaspur we were made to sit up and leave our beds".[7]

Support for the Nationalists and the Home Rule League, however, carried substantial risks. Numerous individuals who openly expressed their political sympathies lost their employment and became subject to various forms of discrimination. Many who believed themselves to have been unjustly treated sought Khaparde's advice and legal assistance, and he frequently helped them without seeking remuneration. On 23 April, while in Nagpur, he describes a particularly revealing case:

> One Mr. Tilak who was a schoolmaster on Rs. 35 a month, was asked, it appears, by the Inspector of School, whether he was a member of the Home Rule League and Mr. Tilak replied in the affirmative. He has been since dismissed without being charged with any official neglect or anything else. He came to see me in the morning and I advised him to apply for copies of the papers leading to his dismissal. He went to Dr. Moonje and brought me a note. I told him to meet me about 5 PM.[8]

Not only Tilak but also Khaparde himself was enthusiastically celebrated throughout Maharashtra. On 3 May, while in Chanda, he notes that they received "a very grand reception such as people usually reserve for Lok. Tilak".[9] Tilak's own esteem for Khaparde is evident from the latter's diary entry of 4 May, written at Nagpur: "At Udhoji's house […] we sat talking about a letter received by Dr. Moonje from Lokamanya Tilak, saying that I should be sent to the Supreme Legislative Council".[10]

When Tilak, Khaparde, and the Nationalist delegation arrived at Nasik on 12 May to attend the Seventeenth Bombay Provincial Conference, they were greeted by such immense crowds that it took them four hours to travel from the railway station to their lodging. The procession was magnificent:

> So far eyes could see there were men and women everywhere on the road, in streets, by-lanes and houses on all sides and they all cheered

6 Kunte, *Source Material*, 407-8.

7 Kunte, *Source Material*, 409.

8 Kunte, *Source Material*, 410.

9 Kunte, *Source Material*, 410.

10 Kunte, *Source Material*, 410.

> with a will […] and there were frequent stoppages for people to make their *namaskar* to Lokamanya.[11]

Only a few weeks earlier, in April, Tilak had delivered an influential discourse at Nasik on the Home Rule resolution beginning with the memorable words: "I am young in spirit though old in body". Together with the celebrated slogan "Home Rule is my birthright",[12] the speech quickly gained immense popularity among the masses. As is well known, Tilak possessed extraordinary oratorical gifts, and even in relatively small towns such as Shinnar and Sangamner he was greeted by enthusiastic crowds. Khaparde writes in his diary:

> (Shinnar) We could not go to Mr. Kavale for *pansupari*[13] because we feared that people would so surround us that we would not get out. We left Babasaheb Deshpande behind because he was lost in the crowd.
>
> (Sangamner) The whole population turned out and there were many outsiders. […] They very nearly caused an accident by each trying to touch the feet of Lokamanya. They broke two Kitson lamps. […] The number of people assembled was over twenty thousand. […] It was an hour past midnight when we returned to our lodging.[14]

It was perhaps at this juncture that Khaparde conceived the idea that it would be auspicious to take Tilak to Shirdi in order to obtain Sai Baba's blessings for his leader and for the Nationalist cause. He had likely entertained this thought for some time and, finding himself now in close proximity to Shirdi, seized the opportunity to recommend the visit to Tilak. The latter apparently raised no objection to halting there and receiving the *darśan* of the saint to whom Khaparde was so deeply devoted.[15] Tilak himself was probably curious to meet Sai Baba, whose popularity among the masses was steadily increasing. Although the saint was generally perceived as a Muslim *faqīr*, the Brahmin Tilak harbored no prejudice toward him. It is possible that he was interested in observing firsthand the atmosphere of Hindu-Muslim harmony that Sai Baba had succeeded in fostering. As a consummate politician, Tilak may also have regarded such a visit as an opportunity to demonstrate his inclusive outlook and reinforce the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity.

11 Kunte, *Source Material*, 411.

12 See Tilak, *His Writings and Speeches*, 241-4.

13 *Pān* and *supārī* refer respectively to betel leaf and areca nut. *Pān* typically consists of a betel leaf wrapped around a preparation containing areca nut together with various spices, sweeteners, and a paste made from slaked lime.

14 Kunte, *Source Material*, 411.

15 According to Narasimhaswami, the reason Tilak visited Shirdi "was only to find out whether Baba approved of the lines on which he was working for national liberation", and when he is said to have put this question to Sai Baba, "the latter studiously avoided giving him a direct answer"; Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 2: 333; see also `http://saiamrithadhara.com/mahabhakthas/dadasaheb_khaparde.html`. There is, however, no independent evidence that Tilak actually posed such a question to Sai Baba, and the contemporary sources remain silent on the matter.

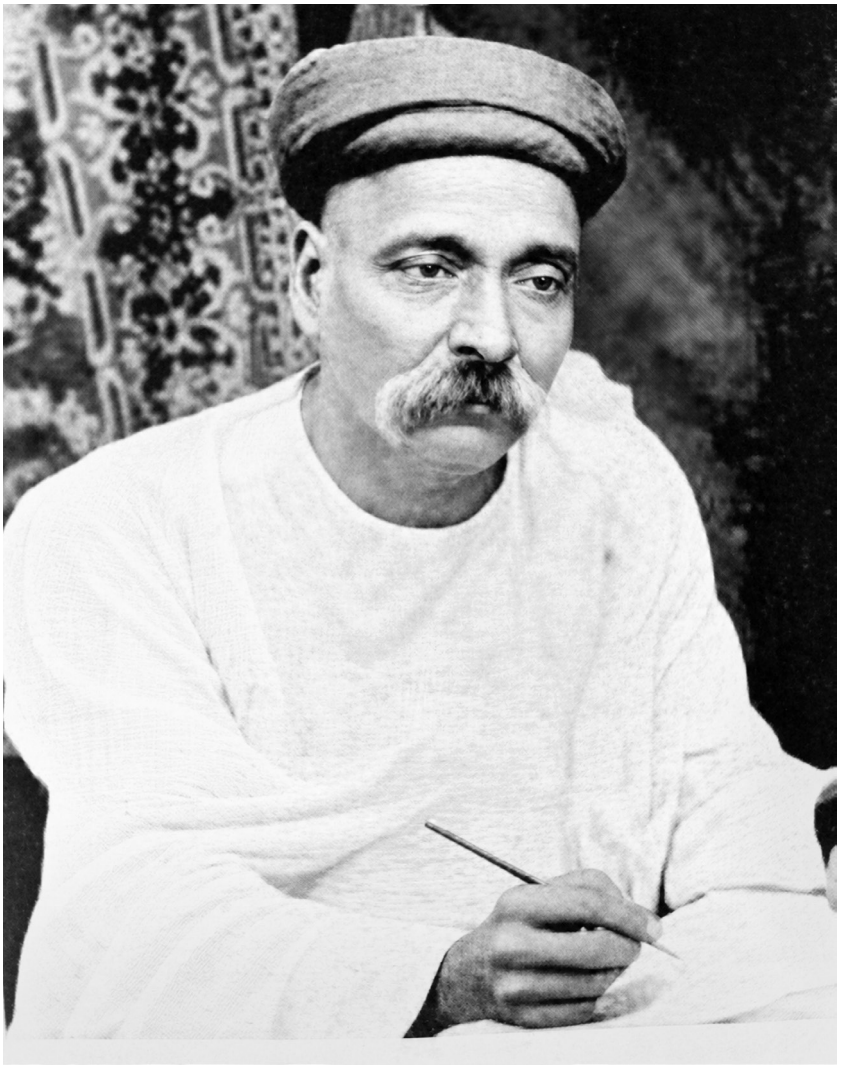


Figure 45 Bal Gangadhar Tilak



Figure 46 Bal Gangadhar Tilak

A different account of how Tilak came to visit Sai Baba is provided by the philosopher and poet Shuddhananda Bharati (1897-1990) in his autobiography *Experiences of a Pilgrim Soul*.[16] According to Bharati, it was he who, during the Lucknow Congress of December 1916, advised Tilak – when Bharati himself was only nineteen years old – to seek the guidance of a saint. When Tilak asked where such a saint could be found, Bharati's companion, a Punjabi holy man named Premji, who was both a devotee of Sai Baba and a friend of Khaparde, replied: "At Shirdi". Khaparde himself is said to have added: "Yes, Sai Ram [= Sai Baba], a powerful saint". Tilak would then have expressed his desire to visit Sai Baba, whom "he had already seen".[17] Despite legitimate reservations regarding this reconstruction, given the self-promotional and devotional character of Bharati's autobiography, there is no compelling reason to doubt that he did in fact meet Tilak and Khaparde at the Lucknow Congress and later accompanied them to Shirdi.

Although Tilak did not hesitate to employ religion in support of his political objectives – as exemplified by his promotion of the Gaṇeśacaturthī festival as a vehicle for large-scale expressions of Nationalist sentiment – he was himself deeply religious and frequently sought the company of *sādhu*s and holy men during his travels throughout India. It should be recalled that, through Khaparde, he had already obtained the *darśan* of Gajanan Maharaj at Akola nine years earlier, in May 1908. Tilak's own religiosity is further reflected in the two English-language works he authored in an attempt to demonstrate the prehistoric antiquity of the *Veda*s: *The Orion; or, Researches into the Antiquity of the Vedas* (1893) and, a decade later, *The Arctic Home in the Vedas* (1903). His most influential work, however, was undoubtedly his Marāṭhī commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*, the *Gītārahasya* ('The Secret Meaning of the *Gītā*'), which he composed during his imprisonment in Burma. Published in 1915, the work appeared in English translation in 1936.[18] In this innovative interpretation, Tilak presents Kṛṣṇa's teaching of *karmayoga*, or selfless action, as a call to restore *dharma* through socio-political engagement. He understood this to be the essential teaching of the poem, in opposition to passive withdrawal from worldly affairs and the renunciation of action. Tilak thus conceived his own political activism as the practical application of Kṛṣṇa's *upadeśa* to Arjuna.[19]

16 On the life and works of Shuddhananda Bharati, see Piaget, *Shuddhananda Bharati*; Ramaswami Sastri, *Works of Shuddhananda Bharati*.

17 See Shuddhananda Bharati, *Experiences of a Pilgrim Soul*, 45-6; `https://archive.org/details/experiences-of-a-pilgrim-soul`. There is, however, no evidence that Tilak ever met Sai Baba prior to 19 May 1917.

18 See Tilak, *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā Rahasya*. On Tilak's *Gītārahasya*, see Mackenzie Brown, "Philosophy of Tilak", 197-206.

19 Khaparde's remarks of 6 June 1901 regarding Tilak's projected commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā* deserve to be quoted in full: "He [= Tilak] told me the plan of his intended work on *Geeta*. He reads it as an episode of *Mahabharata*. The beginning or *upakrama* is about fighting. The *upasaṃhāra* [= conclusion] is also the same, as Arjuna was ultimately induced to fight. The *abhyāsa* [= discipline] is about doing your duty without in the least desiring to enjoy the fruits of your actions. The *apūrvatā* [= originality] consists in the reconciliation of all the philosophies known at the time of *Mahabharata*. The *arthavāda* [= meaning/purpose] comes in various places. Shri Krishna has introduced all the philosophies to show Arjuna that what he maintains is correct from all points of view. The *Geeta* in Mr. Tilak's view is thus a work on Ethics, like the work of Aristotle, and universally accepted as an authority. The main theme is to lay down principles

Sai Baba himself appears to have approved of Tilak's *Gītārahasya*, for on one occasion he presented a copy of the work to one of his devotees. In Dabholkar's *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 27, vv. 132-7), we read:

> Once a parcel came by post at the Shirdi post-office, for Jog, and he immediately set out thither to receive it. As he saw the book, it turned out to be '*Gita Rahasya*', a commentary on the *Bhagavad-Gita* by Lokamanya Tilak. Tucking it under his arm, he at once came to the mosque for *darshan*. As he bowed at Baba's feet, the parcel fell at his feet. "What Bapusaheb! What is this?" Baba then asked. The parcel was opened in front of Baba and Jog then told him what it contained. The parcel with the book in it, was then handed over to Baba. Baba looked at it. He took out the book in his hand, glanced through its pages for a moment and taking out a rupee from his pocket, placed it on the book fondly.[20] He then put it into Jog's *uparna*[21] along with that rupee, saying, "Read this from the beginning to the end. It will be beneficial to you".[22]

For his part, Khaparde was convinced that Sai Baba's blessing upon Tilak would greatly benefit the Nationalist cause. At the same time, he must have been overjoyed at the prospect of once again visiting his beloved master. In Khaparde's understanding, this too was entirely the result of Sai Baba's grace, for it was the saint who drew his devotees toward himself, not the reverse. Thus it came to pass that on 19 May Tilak, Khaparde, and their

to decide questions of right and wrong. Arjuna did not know what to do. There was a conflict of duty. On the one hand, there were relations and he did not like to kill them. On the other hand, there was his duty to fight and acquire the Kingdom. This conflict was to be solved not only (from the) point of social ethics but also in relation to *mokṣa* [= liberation] in a manner to acquire the latter. At his request, I told him the possible objections that may be taken to his theory and I returned home after 9 PM" (Kunte, *Source Material*, 322-3).

20 Symbolically, the number one, represented here by the rupee coin, may be understood as signifying the Supreme Reality, whether conceived as Allāh or *Brahman*. In this context, Sai Baba's gesture could be interpreted as suggesting that Jog's reading of Tilak's *Gītārahasya* would ultimately lead him toward the realization of that Supreme Reality.

21 A long upper garment or scarf traditionally draped over the shoulders.

22 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 444. See also Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 69. In the influential 1977 film *Shirdi ke Sai Baba*, directed by Ashok V. Bhushan and starring Sudhir Dalvi in the role of Sai Baba, there is a noteworthy scene in which the saint praises the *Gītārahasya*. The scene emphasizes that the attainment of independence requires the unity of Indians belonging to all religious communities. What follows is Karline McLain's description and insightful analysis of this episode: "[S]ai Baba singles out G.S. Khaparde, who is standing amid a crowd of devotees, and asks him how such a brave freedom fighter as himself has arrived in Shirdi. Khaparde presents Sai Baba with the *Gita Rahasya* as an offering from its author, Bal Gangadhar Tilak – then imprisoned on charges of sedition – who requests his blessing. Sai Baba takes the book and reverently holds it to his forehead (as opposed to setting it at his feet where flowers and other offerings are placed), and then he explains to his followers – expressly shown in this scene to be Hindu and Muslim – that the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Quran* must not be defiled but must be held up with great respect. Furthermore, he continues, there will come a day when Tilak's *Gita Rahasya* … will reach every home and be read everywhere. In this scene, the film calls upon Hindus and Muslims to respect one another's religious traditions and to set bickering aside so that the two communities can join together in a shared mission to free India from colonial rule. By endorsing the *Gita Rahasya*, here Sai Baba seemingly endorses Tilak's call to action – including armed insurrection – against the British. Given the film's release date, this endorsement is made to seem providential, suggesting to its 1977 audience that Sai Baba – who died three decades before independence – knew through divine insight that India would prevail against the British and that the revolutionary Tilak would deserve to be praised in households throughout the nation for his efforts to secure India's freedom" (McLain, *The Afterlife of Sai Baba*, 143).

companions departed from Sangamner in Ahmednagar District for Yeola in Nasik District. Since Shirdi lay directly along the route – only some thirty-three kilometers from Yeola – it was convenient for them to halt there on the way. What follows is Khaparde's diary entry describing the visit.

> Sangamner - Shirdi - Yeola, Saturday 19 May 1917
>
> I got up early in the morning, but so many people gathered that I could not pray.
> There was a movement to keep us here and not let us go till after noon and Kelkar appeared to throw his weight on the side of the movement, but most unaccountably I felt angry and insisted upon starting. So after a *pansupari* in the house of Mr. Sant, a leading pleader of Sangamner, we started about 8:30 AM.
> We reached Shirdi about 10 AM, after a puncture on the way. We put up in Dixit's Wada. Bapusaheb Buti, Narayan Rao Pandit and the establishment of Buti were there. My old friends Madhavrao Deshpande, Balasaheb Bhate, Bapusaheb Jog and others gathered.
> *We went to the Masjid and paid our respects to Sayin Maharaj. I never saw him so much pleased before. He asked for Daksina as usual and we all paid. Looking at Lokamanya he said, "People are bad, keep yourself to yourself". I made my bow and he took some rupees from me.* Kelkar and Paregonkar also paid. Madhavrao Deshpande asked permission for us to proceed to Yeola. *Sayin Saheb said, "Why do you want to go in the heat to die on the way? Have your food here and then go in the cool of the afternoon. Shyama, feed these people".*
> So we stayed, had our food with Madhavrao Deshpande, lay down for a few minutes and *then again went to the Masjid and found Sayin Maharaj lying down as if sleeping.*
> People gave Lokamanya a pansupari in the Chavadi there and *we returned to the Masjid again. Sayin Maharaj was sitting up and gave us udi and permission to go*, so we started by the motor [...].

The reason why Khaparde "felt angry" with the people of Sangamner – who wished Tilak and his party to remain there until after noon – and also with Narasimha Chintaman Kelkar (1872-1947),[23] a close associate of Tilak who supported such a plan, is readily understandable. Given their demanding itinerary, any delay at Sangamner would have made it difficult, if not altogether impossible, for them to halt at Shirdi on their way to Yeola.[24] Kelkar's desire to postpone their departure and remain in Sangamner further suggests that he had little interest in meeting Sai Baba. Khaparde, however, "insisted upon starting" by motorcar soon after the offering of *pānsupārī*, so that they might

23 Born into a Chitpavan Brahmin family, Kelkar was a lawyer from Miraj in the Sangli District of Maharashtra. A prominent literary and political figure, he served as editor and trustee of the newspaper *Kesari*, acting as editor during Tilak's imprisonments in 1897 and 1908. On N.C. Kelkar, see Watve, "Sri Narasimha Chintaman", 156-8; Kulkarni, "Narasimha Chintaman Kelkar", at https://map.sahapedia.org/article/Narasimha-Chintaman%20Kelkar/6244.

24 Khaparde's statement that he felt angry "most unaccountably" appears somewhat exaggerated, since the cause of his irritation is readily understandable in light of the circumstances. What is noteworthy, however, is that he himself seems to have been surprised by the intensity of his emotional reaction.

reach Shirdi by mid-morning. Despite "a puncture on the way", the journey took only about one and a half hours, and the party arrived at Shirdi around 10 AM and took up accommodation in Dixit's *vāḍā*.

The group immediately proceeded to the mosque in order to "pay their respects" to Sai Baba, and Khaparde notes that he had "never seen him so much pleased before". The diarist must have felt deeply gratified and perhaps even proud that he had succeeded in bringing Tilak to Shirdi. Evidently, Sai Baba was delighted to receive the Lokamanya and bestowed his blessings upon him. In 1936, Rao Bahadur Hari Vinayak Sathe informed Narasimhaswami that Sai Baba had in fact foretold Tilak's visit:

> Sometime in 1917, Baba said "Tilak is coming here". As there seemed to be nothing to induce Lokamanya to visit him, I thought Baba was referring to Tilak Maharaj, i.e., Vaman Maharaj Tilak. In fact, however, Lokamanya visited him soon after (i.e., on 19 May 1917).[25]

As was customary, Sai Baba asked Tilak and the members of his party for *dakṣiṇā*, and each of them complied. The saint's words to Tilak – "People are bad, keep yourself to yourself" – may be compared with the complementary recollection of Bapusaheb Jog, who was likewise present in the *masjid*. According to Jog, Sai Baba told Tilak: "You have done much for the people but now you should also take care of your soul".[26] The injunction "keep yourself to yourself" suggests that Sai Baba was advising Tilak to withdraw from excessive public involvement and cultivate a more inward and contemplative life, since "people are bad".[27] Time, indeed, was growing short for Tilak. In 1917 he was already sixty-one years old, and he would pass away little more than three years later, on 1 August 1920. Sai Baba's counsel accords closely with Jog's reminiscence that Tilak should now attend to his soul, devoting the remaining years of his life to *sādhanā*. Through his *antarajñāna*, or inner spiritual insight, Sai Baba appears not only to have perceived that Tilak's earthly life was approaching its end, but also that his preeminent role in Indian politics was gradually waning despite the favorable political climate. The star of Gandhi – the Mahātmā or "great-souled one"[28] – was already rising on the horizon. Along similar lines, Shuddhananda Bharati, who also claimed to have been present in the mosque, recalls Sai Baba addressing Tilak with the words: "Go and take rest. Freedom shall come to India".[29]

As was customary, Khaparde requested permission to depart for Yeola through Sai Baba's close intermediary, Madhavrao Deshpande, and the saint granted it immediately. At the same time, however, Sai Baba advised Tilak

25 Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 125.

26 Swami Sai Sharan Anand, *Shri Sai Baba*, 301. According to Narasimhaswami, Sai Baba addressed Tilak in the following words: "You are getting old. You require rest. Why don't you take rest?" (Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 2: 333-4); see also `http://saiamrithadhara.com/mahabhakthas/dadasaheb_khaparde.html`, 11.

27 This is likewise Narasimhaswami's interpretation; see McLain, *The Afterlife of Sai Baba*, 97. According to Pramod Aher, however, Sai Baba's words to Tilak may instead have alluded to the presence of spies in Shirdi, such as the so-called 'Hamsa'; see Aher, *Shirdi Gazetteer*, 172.

28 The honorific title Mahātmā was first applied to Gandhi in South Africa in 1914.

29 Shuddhananda Bharati, *Experiences of a Pilgrim Soul*, 46. Moreover, Sai Baba is reported to have declared: "Do you think I am this flesh and bone? They call me Sai! I have no name, no form. I am God – Anal Haq". […] "All the sky-bound space is my *mandir*. Its sanctum is the heart"; *ibid.*

and his companions not to hurry but rather to remain in Shirdi for lunch and rest for a while before resuming their journey. He affectionately told them: "Why do you want to go in the heat to die on the way? Have your food here and then go in the cool of the afternoon. Shyama, feed these people". Sai Baba clearly wished to honor his distinguished guests, and everyone complied with his request by dining together with Madhavrao Deshpande. After reclining "for a few minutes", they hastened back to the mosque in order to bid farewell to the saint, only to find "Sayin Maharaj lying down as if sleeping". Whether resting physically or absorbed in contemplation, Sai Baba's posture itself may be understood as conveying the value of inwardness and reiterating to Tilak the importance of repose and detachment. Consequently, the visitors had to wait and return somewhat later. In the meantime, the local residents took the opportunity to honor Lokamanya Tilak by offering him *pānsupārī* in the *cāvaḍī*.

When Tilak, Khaparde, and the members of their party finally returned to the *masjid* – presumably around mid-afternoon – they found Sai Baba once again "sitting up". The saint graciously bestowed upon each of them his sacred ash as a token of blessing and permission to depart for Yeola. Thereupon they "started by the motor" without further delay.[30] At Yeola, however, a large crowd was already eagerly awaiting them, immediately drawing them back into the fervor of the Home Rule campaign. As Khaparde records in his diary: "Mr. Wagh and others walked round about to keep the crowd orderly. There was a tremendous meeting in the town. The Assistant D.S.P.[31] and police in full force attended it. About ten thousand may have been present".[32]

A markedly different account of Tilak's meeting with Sai Baba was published in 1928 by Narasimha Chintaman Kelkar, who had himself been an eyewitness to the events. The narrative appears in the *upasaṃhāra* ("Epilogue", Part 9, 38-9) of the third and final volume of his monumental Marāṭhī biography *Lokmānya Ṭiḷak yāñce caritra*. The first volume of this work, originally published in 1923, was translated into English by D.V. Divekar in 1928.[33] Kelkar's testimony is particularly valuable because it constitutes the only extant account that permits direct comparison with Khaparde's diary narrative.[34] For this reason, it deserves to be reproduced in full. The following is an English translation:

> There was another incident worth recording. It happened thus. In 1917, after the conference in Nasik, Tilak started for Sangamner by motorcar. En route, at some distance, lies Shirdi. Dadasaheb Khaparde, Hari

30 Shuddhananda Bharati, however, claims to have remained in Shirdi "at His feet for three months, receiving the current of Divine touch"; Shuddhananda Bharati, *Experiences of a Pilgrim Soul*, 49.

31 D.S.P. stands for Deputy Superintendent of Police, a post created in 1876 as part of the British policy of Indianization.

32 Kunte, *Source Material*, 412. In 1985, Uddhavrao, son of Madhavrao Deshpande, recalled that Sai Baba advised Tilak to avoid Yeola because of riots and proceed directly to Manmad (Rigopoulos, *Oral Testimonies on Sai Baba*, 31–2). This account, however, conflicts with Khaparde's diary.

33 See Kelkar, *Life and Times of Tilak*.

34 Methodologically, it should be noted that these accounts differ considerably in character and temporal proximity. Khaparde's diary is a contemporaneous record and therefore carries particular evidentiary weight. Kelkar's, Narasimhaswami's, and Shuddhananda Bharati's accounts, by contrast, are retrospective and are shaped to varying degrees by memory, theological interpretation, sectarian attitudes, and literary self-presentation. They should not be dismissed, but they must be read critically and compared with the contemporaneous evidence.

Sitaram Dixit were staying near Sai Baba. Tilak went out of his way to meet Khaparde at Shirdi. It is certain that he would not have gone for the sake of Sai Maharaj. On reaching there, Sai Maharaj asked for *dakshina* from Tilak and as what he gave was less Sai Baba asked for some more. Tilak borrowed money and paid the amount. Somebody applied *udi* to him and gave him a coconut as *prasad* which he accepted. But there was an embarrassing situation for Tilak which tested his considerate nature.

When Tilak went to take leave of Sai Maharaj, the latter asked for water as he was thirsty. Someone handed to him a Muslim style *lota*[35] with a spout from which he drank water. In the meantime, a faithful disciple thought that the water tasted by Sai Baba should be distributed as *tirtha*[36] to all. And he began serving a small quantity of *tirtha* in the hollow of the palm of everyone. One could discern the look of embarrassment in Tilak's eyes. But he could not say 'no' and swallowed the *tirtha* without showing his displeasure. Actually Tilak could have avoided this. He certainly had the presence of mind to do so. But even thinking of a way out he did not follow it because of the nearness of his friend. How could he hurt his feelings? And, secondly, he had voluntarily gone to the place of a person regarded as holy. So his inclination not to behave in a manner insulting to him or hurting the sentiments of others.

Actually if Tilak wished to cut off anyone his tongue was sharp enough and his hands ever ready for action. But there is a proverb in English to the effect that even a lion roaring like thunder makes a cooing sound like a pigeon out of regard for sentiments or opinions of others and his clear sound is not heard outside but resounds deep inside. The truth of this is realized in Tilak's conduct not only towards an old time-honored practice but also towards a travesty of it.[37]

It appears either that Kelkar did not accurately remember the circumstances of that day – he wrote his account approximately a decade after the events – or that he consciously altered them. At the time of the visit, Khaparde was not in Shirdi with Hari Sitaram Dixit, whom he never mentions in his diary entry, but was instead travelling together with Kelkar and Tilak from Sangamner. Tilak therefore did not go "out of his way to meet Khaparde at Shirdi"; rather, he agreed to halt at Shirdi and receive Sai Baba's *darśan* while en route to Yeola. Indeed, as Khaparde records, it was Kelkar himself who "appeared to throw his weight on the side of the movement" to delay their departure from Sangamner. He failed in this attempt because Khaparde "felt angry and insisted upon starting".

Kelkar's assertion that "it is certain" Tilak "would not have gone [to Shirdi] for the sake of Sai Maharaj" is therefore unwarranted. What appears reasonably clear is that Kelkar resisted going to Shirdi because of his prejudice against Sai Baba as a Muslim *faqīr*. On the other hand, Tilak displayed no apparent hostility toward Sai Baba and may well have been curious to meet the saint, knowing the depth of his friend Khaparde's devotion to him.

35 A *loṭā* is a small round metal vessel used for storing or pouring water.

36 Lit. 'ford' or 'crossing'. Here *tīrtha* refers to sanctified water, made holy through Sai Baba's drinking from it.

37 Kher, *Sai Baba*, 126-7.

Kelkar further notes that Sai Baba requested *dakṣiṇā* from Tilak, but omits the important fact – explicitly mentioned by Khaparde – that the saint asked *dakṣiṇā* from everyone present, including Kelkar himself. The additional detail that Tilak's initial offering was considered insufficient and that Sai Baba therefore requested more, prompting Tilak to borrow money to complete the amount, is entirely plausible, since similar incidents are frequently attested in the sources. Less convincing, however, is Kelkar's anonymous reference to "somebody" applying *udī* to Tilak's forehead and presenting him with a coconut as *prasād*. In the available accounts, it is consistently Sai Baba himself who applies the sacred ash to devotees and personally distributes *prasād*. Given Kelkar's evident hostility toward the *faqīr*, whom he seems to have regarded as ritually impure, it is possible that he preferred not to state explicitly that Sai Baba touched Tilak and personally bestowed his blessings upon him.

Kelkar also insists that the visit placed Tilak in "an embarrassing situation". According to his account, the incident occurred in the afternoon when Tilak and his companions returned to take leave of Sai Baba. Khaparde, significantly, says nothing about it. Sai Baba, being thirsty, asked for water and drank from what Kelkar describes as "a Muslim style *lota* with a spout". One of the devotees then conceived the idea that the water touched by Sai Baba should be distributed to all as *tīrtha*, and accordingly offered a small quantity into the cupped palms of those present. Kelkar claims that one could perceive "the look of embarrassment in Tilak's eyes", though Tilak nevertheless consumed the *tīrtha* "without showing his displeasure".

The episode itself appears entirely plausible. Tilak's hesitation may indeed reflect the instinctive reaction of a Brahmin concerned about ritual pollution. Yet what is truly significant is that he did not refuse the *tīrtha*, and Kelkar's own explanation for this acceptance is not unreasonable. It may be suggested that this episode functioned, symbolically at least, as a kind of test for Tilak: had he refused the *tīrtha*, Sai Baba might well have interpreted such a gesture as evidence of religious narrow-mindedness. Instead, Tilak silently accepted and consumed it, despite his apparent discomfort. Sai Baba may well have appreciated the difficulty of this gesture and recognized in it a willingness to transcend inherited prejudices. In this sense, the *faqīr*'s action may be interpreted as a lesson directed toward overcoming religious barriers and fostering Hindu-Muslim harmony. Although initially taken aback, Tilak may have grasped the broader implications of his response. In the end, the 'lion', as Kelkar metaphorically describes him, passed what may be interpreted as a test by demonstrating *viveka*, or discriminative insight.

The reason Khaparde omitted all mention of this episode is probably that he considered it entirely unremarkable. For him, accepting Sai Baba's *tīrtha* without fear of ritual contamination was perfectly natural, and Tilak's participation would therefore not have appeared noteworthy. Kelkar, however, apparently deeply conditioned by anti-Muslim prejudice, was naturally inclined to focus upon the incident and scrutinize Tilak's reaction. From Kelkar's perspective, everything that transpired in the mosque – the *faqīr*'s repeated requests for *dakṣiṇā*, his distribution of *udī* and coconuts as *prasād*, and the collective sharing of water sanctified by his touch – represented merely "a travesty", that is, a distortion or caricature of true religion.

Kelkar's silence regarding Sai Baba's hospitality is equally revealing. He says nothing of the saint's thoughtful arrangements for the guests to be fed

by Madhavrao Deshpande, nor of his affectionate concern that Tilak and his companions should rest, avoid travelling in the heat, and leave Shirdi only "in the cool of the afternoon". This omission is consistent with Kelkar's hostility toward Sai Baba. Indeed, throughout his account he has nothing positive to say about the saint. He seems to have regarded the halt at Shirdi as a complete waste of time. He likely found it difficult to understand what attracted an accomplished intellectual such as Khaparde to the feet of an uneducated rustic *faqīr*. His account strongly suggests that he regarded Khaparde's devotion to Sai Baba as a misplaced fascination: at best something eccentric and irrational, at worst a deviation from orthodox Hindu norms.

Taken as a whole, Kelkar's account is undoubtedly biased and therefore serves to highlight even more clearly the relative fairness and sobriety of Khaparde's narrative. Yet precisely because of their striking contrast, the two accounts are extraordinarily illuminating when read together.[38] It is unfortunate that neither Khaparde nor Kelkar records Tilak's own explicit impressions of Sai Baba. Shuddhananda Bharati alone attributes to Tilak the following assessment: "He [= Sai Baba] is a Saint for all, who speaks not from books but from the soul".[39] What remains certain is that Khaparde succeeded in bringing his political leader face to face with his beloved *guru*-god and that Sai Baba – whom Khaparde says he had "never seen so much pleased before" – lavished his blessings upon Tilak.

One consequence of Tilak's visit to Shirdi was that the District Collector of Ahmednagar reportedly dispatched officers to monitor Sai Baba's activities and conversations. Given Tilak's reputation among the British authorities, anyone associated with him naturally became suspect. Sai Baba's movements and interactions continued to be closely observed throughout 1917 and 1918, until the end of his life. The presence of such detectives – of whose activities Sai Baba was almost certainly aware – may have been both irritating and amusing to him, given the absurdity of the situation. Had he engaged in political discussions with devotees, the information would almost certainly have reached the authorities immediately through police reports.

In this connection, the testimony of Mr. Chakra Narayana is especially valuable. A Christian who served as police sub-inspector (*fouzdar*) at Kopargaon at the time of Sai Baba's death in October 1918, he was interviewed by Narasimhaswami on 20 October 1936, when he was approximately fifty years old. He recalled:

> I was Police Fouzdar at Kopargaon when Baba passed away (October 1918). I was not a believer in Baba. We were watching Baba through our men. Even though I watched him skeptically, the result was to create in me a high regard for him. First and foremost was the fact that he was not moved by women or wealth. Many women would come to him and place their heads on his feet and sit before him. But he was unmoved; he would not care to cast one glance of admiration, or of lust at them. He was clearly and unmistakably unattached. About money also, we watched him. People voluntarily gave him money. If any did not give him money, Baba would not curse or hate or be displeased with him. The same

38 On these issues, see Shepherd, *Faqir of Shirdi*, 126-8; Kher, *Sai Baba*, 124-9.

39 Shuddhananda Bharati, *Experiences of a Pilgrim Soul*, 47.

held good about his begging for bread. He did not care for what he got. Whatever he got, he scattered with a liberal hand. When he died, we took possession of his cash; that was only Rs. 16. Yet daily he was paying or giving away hundreds of rupees. Often we noticed that his receipts were smaller than his disbursements. Wherefrom came the excess for him to disburse or pay? We could not make out. This made me conclude that he had divine powers.

Again his behavior towards all religions was noble. He would never decry or deprecate any religion or person belonging to any caste, group or position. When I went there, he was told that the Fouzdar was a Christian. "What of that?" was his reply, "He is my brother". His powers were marvellous. A Police Officer went to him; Baba asked him for *dakshina*. The Officer replied that he had nothing. Baba then said, "See your purse. There is a fifty rupee note in it". The note was then produced and offered to Baba. But Baba wanted only a small amount out of it and told him to keep the balance, as he would soon be in trouble and need it. So indeed it happened. Soon after this visit, the Officer got into trouble and had to use that balance to extricate himself. After thus escaping from the trouble, the grateful Officer sent the balance to Shirdi.

I helped at the time when Baba's properties were attached at his death. Statements were taken from the public as to the disposal of the property, and the Mamlatdar Magistrate issued orders based upon the statements. This saved much trouble to the Samsthan. Baba's *udi* has cured many cases of illness.[40]

This testimony strongly suggests that Sai Baba remained entirely detached from politics and never expressed opinions regarding Tilak's activities, the Nationalists, or British rule. He was, above all, a *faqīr*, the embodiment of equanimity and detachment – a *vairāgyamūrti* – who showed no interest in political movements, whether the Home Rule movement, the activities of the Indian National Congress, or the struggle for independence. His energies were directed wholly toward the spiritual upliftment of his devotees, guiding them toward devotion and communion with God. As Chandra Bhanu Satpathy rightly observes: "[T]here is no evidence that Shirdi Sai ever made any political predictions or advised any of his devotees on matters of politics or encouraged any sort of political activism".[41]

Nevertheless, Sai Baba's words to Tilak – as reported respectively by Khaparde, Bapusaheb Jog, and Shuddhananda Bharati – namely, "People are bad, keep yourself to yourself", "You have done much for the people but now you should also take care of your soul", and "Go and take rest. Freedom shall come to India", may reasonably be interpreted as implying that Tilak's political methods and ideals had reached their culmination and were destined gradually to recede. From a theological perspective, Sai Baba's words may be understood as indicating an awareness that Tilak's earthly life was approaching its conclusion and that he should therefore devote himself more fully to *sādhanā* than to political activism. By acknowledging that Tilak had already "done much for the people", the saint may also have intimated that a new political era, with new leaders and new methods, was rapidly

40 Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 92-3.

41 Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 27.

emerging. In retrospect, one naturally thinks of the rise of Gandhi, although Sai Baba himself never referred to him explicitly in the available sources.

Khaparde, however, would remain permanently opposed to Gandhi's political program, disagreeing with the philosophy and practical application of nonviolent resistance (*satyāgraha*, 'truth-force'), as well as with the Non-Cooperation Movement inaugurated in September 1920. Significantly, when Gandhi and Tilak met at the political conference held at Belgaum in 1916, Khaparde reportedly remarked: "He [= Gandhi] is not one of us".[42]

Even Sai Baba's insistence that Tilak and his companions remain in Shirdi for food and rest, instead of immediately continuing their journey to Yeola, may be interpreted symbolically as an invitation to withdraw, if only briefly, from the relentless agitation of public life. Sai Baba himself embodied this spirit of serene detachment when the visitors returned to the mosque in the early afternoon hoping to bid him farewell, only to find him "lying down as if sleeping", thereby obliging them to remain somewhat longer in the village and partake leisurely of a *pānsupārī* in the *cāvaḍī*. It seems reasonable to assume that this additional 'delay' irritated Kelkar, who was evidently eager to leave Shirdi as quickly as possible.

42 Rothermund, "Maharashtra's Response to Gandhian Nationalism", 73. Tilak regarded Gandhi as belonging neither to the Moderates nor to the Nationalists, but rather to a 'third path' (*tṛtīyapanthī*); see *ibid*.