

A short review of:

SAI BABA HIS DIVINE GLIMPSES

V. B. KHER

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“There have been, in the past, many books on Shri Sai Baba, but this volume is distinguished for the stress on authenticity. Every chapter speaks for the incisive approach adopted by the author who has made a study of Shri Sai Baba a lifetime mission. All aspects of Shri Sai Baba’s life and work are inquired into, as also the nature of his functions and powers. Sai Baba was a unique and rare blend of all faiths; for him there were no barriers of religion, sect, race, sex, caste, creed, language and nationality.”

(V.B. KHER, from the Foreword)

At 1st electronic edition, 2009, prepared by: Damjan Plut,
editor of publishing house Bird Publisher
(www.bird-publisher.com).

FOREWORD (by Author)

“Intrigued by the mystery shrouding the birth, birthplace and family background of Shri Sai Baba, the writer paid a personal visit to Pathri, along with his wife in June 1975, picked up clues casually dropped in conversation, pursued them with zeal, patiently culled the evidence and pieced it together with detachment. All evidence, he avers, points to Pathri as the place of his birth, the Yajurvedi Deshastha Brahmin family of the Bhusaris as the one in which Baba chose to take his birth.”

This is how Shri V. B. Kher introduces his work on Shri Sai Baba and, frankly, it is a monumental study in patience, hard work and total devotion to the subject on hand.

This takes us back a quarter of century when little information was available about Shri Sai Baba’s nativity. In the past there has been much argument over not only his place of birth but of his origin though information was not lacking for those who really wanted to know the truth. What was missing was a sustained effort to piece together bits and pieces of information, string them in a meaningful and credible way so that Truth, like the morning sun, emerged in all its glory.

This called for two virtues not always associated with researchers: unflinching determination and total objectivity. Myths are easy to accept, hard to prove, like, for example, the Miracle of the Mare. Was there really a place called Dhupkhed? Was a ‘miracle’ performed in actuality? In 1982, writes Shri Kher, visitors from Aurangabad had not even heard of Dhupkhed, so lost was it in the wilderness. Shri Kher’s description of how he finally located the village and how much effort it took shows his devotion. The mare belonged to one Chand Patil. Where exactly did Chand Patil meet Shri Sai Baba? No details are given in *Shri Sai Satcharita*. It is to the credit of Shri Kher that he determinedly set out to go to the roots of the historic encounter.

Then there is the mystery shrouding the guru of Shri Sai Baba. Here again there are theories set out, one by Das Ganu Maharaj, and another by Swami Sai Sharan Anand. With commendable scholarship Shri Kher examines both and has arrived at his own conclusions. According to Shri Kher, Shri Sai Baba’s guru was “an unknown Sufi divine”. This may still remain a matter of argument, but certainly it would be hard to challenge the author’s logic.

Shri Kher moves on to make a study of Shri Sai Baba’s connections with Sufis. It is well to remember that Marathwada was, for a long time, under Islamic influence. The close of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century AD indeed had witnessed the influx of a large number of Muslim saints and holy men into the Deccan. These were Sufi divines of different orders. Their successors undoubtedly roamed the countryside and surely exerted a great deal of influence over village people. “The fact that Sai Baba’s guru was a Sufi,” remarks Shri Kher, “is not a matter of surprise.” It should not be.

There have been, in the past, many books on Shri Sai Baba, but this volume is distinguished for the stress on authenticity. Every chapter speaks for the incisive approach adopted by the author who has made a study of Shri Sai Baba a lifetime mission. All aspects of Shri Sai Baba’s life and work are inquired into, as also the nature of his functions and powers. Sai Baba was a unique and rare blend of all faiths; for him there were no barriers of religion, sect, race, sex, caste, creed, language and nationality. What should not, therefore, be surprising is that, as Shri Kher puts it, “he confirmed every devotee who came to him in his own faith and spiritual practices suited to his level of development and exhorted all by precept and example to be tolerant and charitable to others who were not of their faith and followed practices and ways appearing strange to them.” What is remarkable is that Sai Baba founded no new sect of his own nor did he establish any seat or *peeth*, nor leave any spiritual heir. He was against conversion. It is said that when a Hindu converted to Islam was taken to him, he got angry and slapped the man saying: “Aren’t you ashamed to change your father?” And yet here was a man who was deeply himself rooted in the *Quran* and made a *masjid* his home.

Shri Sai Baba lived at a time when there were no major newspapers, certainly no radio and telephone, and communication was primitive. Whatever we know about this saint has come largely from hearsay. In accepting second-hand information one is in danger of accepting fiction for fact. Scholars of the *Bible* can vouchsafe for the fact that not all Christ's chosen disciples were necessarily agreed on some facts of His life. John, Luke, Mathew, Mark each has his own account of the last days of Jesus. This is understandable, considering the times they lived in. But it would have been unforgivable were there no effort made to give an authentic and authenticated account of Shri Sai Baba and his times. That Shri Kher has succeeded in providing it almost down to the last detail calls for commendation. The tendency in the past has been to accept *ShriSai Satcharita* as the *pothi* or *gatha* of the *leelas* of Sai Baba. Indeed, answers to many pertinent questions about Sai Baba are to be found in it. But like the true scholar that Shri Kher is, he has a warning to sound. He writes: "It must not be forgotten, however, that it is more in the nature of 'religious text' and the core of it is in essence a legend rather than historical truth." This book is a testimony to Shri Kher's pursuit of Truth. It invites – and surely deserves – Sai Baba's blessings.

19.1.2000

W.K.Kawale

A Search for the Birthplace of Sai Baba

“Sai Baba was neither a Hindu nor a Muslim but above both.” Thus spoke S.B. Dhumal, an ardent devotee of Sai Baba and a leading lawyer of Nasik, in reply to a question of a District Magistrate.¹ This reply is undoubtedly wise and replete with meaning. A man of God, whatever be his caste or colour, is worthy of our respect. A popular Marathi saying discourages the search for the origin of a river and the birth of a sage, for the fear that the researcher may be disappointed with their humble beginnings. Whatever might have been the truth of this adage, the dictum is no longer valid. In this age of fast advancing technology, when all values are in a melting pot, even “every formula of every religion has to submit to the acid test of reason and universal justice if it is to ask for universal assent.”² The extended truth is applicable also to holy personages who have left their footprints on the sands of time. Those who have read Prof. Erik H. Erikson’s *Gandhi’s Truth* which describes “a Westerner’s and a psychoanalyst’s search for the historical presence of Mahatma Gandhi and for the meaning of what he called “Truth”,³ will grasp the full implication of this statement. Researching into the questions as to the place of Sai Baba’s birth, the family in which he was born, etc., may give us a historical hindsight into the later events in Sai Baba’s life. In this belief my wife and I made a pilgrimage to the “birthplace” of Sai Baba in Marathwada in June 1975 and the outcome of our research is stated in this research paper.

Before I do so, let me record briefly the information available about the appearance of Sai Baba, his dress, his food habits, his surroundings in Shirdi and the theories put forward about his place of birth and his family.

Sai Baba was well-built and had arms which reached up to his knees. He was of medium height and had a fair, yellowish complexion. But “one’s first impression about him was derived from his eyes.” There was such power and penetration in them that none could continue to look at him without feeling that Sai Baba was reading him through and through.⁴ His ears were pierced⁵ and he was not circumcised,⁶ indicating that he must have been a Hindu. But he dressed like a *fakir* and lived in an old tumble-down mosque which was strangely called by him as Dwarkamai. *Dhuni* or a sacred fire was constantly burning in the mosque and the devotees were allowed to worship him with fanfare including blowing of conches and ringing of bells.

In the courtyard outside the mosque was a Tulsi Brindaban. Ramanavami was celebrated by his Hindu devotees in the courtyard, in which Sai Baba joyfully participated. At the same time, he had no objection to the local Muslims taking out a sandal procession on the same day. He was catholic in his food habits, and is said to have partaken of meat and fish in the company of fellow *fakirs*. The name of “Allah Malik” was constantly on the tip of his tongue. Yet, he appeared in the garb of Rama, Krishna, Ganesh, Shiva, Hanuman, Dattatreya or the Guru of devotee concerned. He had intimate knowledge of the *Bhagavad Gita* as his exposition to Nanasaheb Chandorkar demonstrated. But he also recited the first chapter of the *Quran* in the company of Muslims. He was known to be fluent in many languages, but none knew how and when he acquired such mastery. All in all, he was a phenomenon and all that one can truly say of him was that he was cast in the mould of renowned yogis of yore, with deep influence of Sufism on him. It is significant to note in this connection, that in examination on commission issued by a court, Sai Baba stated in reply to one of the questions that his “creed” or “religion” was Kabir.⁷

Hari Sitaram Dikshit, a solicitor and former member of the Bombay Legislative Council, and the most selfless devotee of Sai Baba, sacrificing his all in the cause of his Sadguru, says in his foreword to *Shri Sai Satcharita*⁸ as follows : “There is no reliable information as to where he was born and who were his Parents. But it can be stated authoritatively that he must have had links with the Nizam’s State (later called Hyderabad State which, under the Scheme of Reorganisation of States in 1956, was divided on linguistic lines and merged with Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra). In his conversation there were often references to places like Selu, Jalna, Manavat, Pathri, Parabhani, Aurangabad, Bhir and Bedar. Once a visitor from Pathri came to Shirdi for Sai Baba’s *darshan*. Sai

Baba, gathering information about conditions in Pathri, enquired with him about many leading citizens of Pathri. This suggests that he had special knowledge of Pathri but it cannot be said with certainty that he was born in Pathri. It cannot be said also definitely whether Sai Baba was a Brahmin or Muslim by birth.”⁹

Mhalsapati, one of the earliest devotees of Sai Baba, has stated that Sai Baba had told him that he (Sai Baba) was born in a Brahmin family at Pathri and his parents had handed him over to a *fakir* in his childhood. Soon after Sai Baba had given him this information, a person from Pathri, who had come on business to a nearby village called Korhala, had visited Shirdi when Sai Baba had asked him about several residents of Pathri by their names.¹⁰ Mhalsapati Bhagat was a man of truth and integrity and was held in high esteem even by Sai Baba because of his *Vairagya* (renunciation). His testimony is therefore Important and can be said to be indisputable.¹¹

Sai Baba discouraged any questions about his parentage and said that *Purush* was his father and *Maya* his mother. A lifelong researcher and biographer observes that Sai Baba’s birth remains a mystery and he had not met any individual who had direct knowledge about it.¹²

Another person whose testimony is weighty is Vaman Prangovind Patel, a solicitor who, since he donned the robes of a *sanyasi* in 1953, is known as Swami Sai Sharan Anand. The new name itself indicates the extent of his reverence for devotion to Sai Baba.

We must examine his credentials further in detail, if we are to accept what he says on the subject matter, in his biography of Sai Baba written in Gujarati.

Vaman Patel was born on 5 April 1889, and is still living.¹³ He graduated with philosophy from Elphinstone College, Bombay, in 1910 and passed his LL.B in 1912. Like Swami Vivekananda, he wanted to see God face to face. He met many *sadhus* but none could satisfy his desire. Finally, his father suggested that he should visit Sai Baba. So in December 1911, he travelled from Bombay to Kopergaon by train and reached Shirdi by tonga. When the tonga reached the border of Shirdi, the *tongawala* pointed out to him Sai Baba who was just ahead of them. Vaman alighted and prostrated before Sai Baba. Imagine his wonder when Sai Baba exclaimed to him, “God Is. Why do you say He is not?” Swamiji (Vaman Patel) personally narrated to the writer an account of his first encounter with Sai Baba in the fateful year of 1911, which was to change the whole life of young Vaman. All his doubts were silenced and he felt that he was in the presence of a Master whom he could accept as his Sadguru. In 1913 when Vaman visited Shirdi during the summer vacation, Sai Baba detained him at Shirdi for eleven months, and one day without being asked, was given permission to leave Shirdi. During his long stay, Vaman was sent on begging rounds by Sai Baba, and he came into close and intimate contact with Sai Baba. Sai Baba affectionately nicknamed him “Babu”.¹⁴

In course of time, Vaman Patel became a solicitor and practised, but his real interest lay in matters moral and spiritual. He is a savant and has written extensively for Sastu Sahitya Vardhak Karyalaya. He has also rendered *Shri Sai Satcharita* into chaste but simple Gujarati verse. His biography of Sai Baba and his tenets in Gujarati is a must for every serious student of Sai Baba.¹⁵

With these prefatory remarks about Swami Sai Sharan Anand let us now turn to his narration of Sai Baba. He says that it is indisputable that Sai Baba considered himself a Brahmin and got annoyed with anyone who suggested that he was not a Brahmin! In 1912, Vaman’s father was suffering from dropsy and there was no hope of cure. In December of that year Vaman visited Shirdi. Reading his thoughts, Sai Baba asked him to get his father to Shirdi. But the thought crossed his mind, would his conservative father come to one who was considered by his family to be a Muslim? Immediately Baba intercepted with the remark, “Am I not a Brahmin?” Swamiji also records that the oldest devotee of Sai Baba, Mhalsapati, had been told by Baba himself that he was born in a Yajurvedi Deshastha Brahmin family at Pathri and he was handed over to a *fakir* as a child.¹⁶ He further states that Sai Baba had once told him in a conversation that he had left his parents at the age of eight and arrived on the banks of Godavari.¹⁷

The tale of Sai Baba's birth is also described in an article by Suman Sundar¹⁸ as said to have been narrated to him by the noted saint Madhavnath, a summary of which appears at page 16 of Swami Sai Sharan Anand's biography of Sai Baba. The story goes that there was a Yajurvedi Deshastha Brahmin in Pathri who had three sons. Sai Baba was the eldest. When Sai Baba was five years old, a *fakir* came to the Brahmin and said, "Give me my own." The Brahmin replied, "Everything I have is yours." Thereupon the *fakir* asked for the eldest son and took him away. He reappeared after four years, and with the consent of the Brahmin, again took away the boy for three more years. From the age of twelve to eighteen, Sai Baba remained incognito and was seen at Shirdi under the neem tree when he was nineteen.

Yet another version is contained in the biography of Sathya Sai Baba, who claims to be a reincarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi. Swami Sai Sharan Anand refers to this story at pages 13 and 27-28 in his biography of Sai Baba of Shirdi. It appears that Sai Baba's parents were residents of Pathri. His father was Gangabhava, and Devagiramma was his mother. They were a pious couple and were devotees of Lord Shankara. As they had no issue they were sad. However, through the practice of penance they obtained a boon from Shankara-Parvati and as a result, Shankara took birth in their family as Sai Baba. Gradually, Gangabhava became more and more absorbed in his *tapas*, and he decided to renounce the world.

Devagiramma insisted on accompanying him. So both of them retired to a forest abandoning Sai Baba under a tree. A *fakir* and his spouse were passing by. They saw the child, and regarding it as a gift from Allah adopted it and brought it up until Sai was twelve. Later, the *fakir* was pressurised by local Muslims to turn him out as he was fond of playing with a Shiva Linga which he won in a game he played with the son of a local zamindar. So began his wanderings along the banks of Godavari, in the course of which he came to Aurangabad. There he encountered Chand Patil of Dhupkhed, who recovered his lost mare Through the grace of Sai. The later part of his story is known to all.

And so Pathri was our destination ! Yet we knew so little about Pathri, when we planned to visit it. The history of Pathri which is recorded below in some detail was gathered only after our return from Pathri from personal discussions with a learned friend, who is a noted authority on the history of the mediaeval Deccan, and reference books.

Pathri, which was in early mediaeval times known as Parthapur after Partha or Arjuna, the hero of *Mahabharata* and the third of the Pandavas, is situated about 150 kms. south-east of Devagiri (Daulatabad) and about 3 kms. south-west from the confluence of Vidarbha (Mangala) and Godavari rivers. It was a part of Vidarbha kingdom which was ruled by Yadavas of Deogiri and was a seat of mathematical learning.¹⁹

As Pathri was a part of Yadava kingdom, its history is a part of the history of Deogiri or Daulatabad. It was the village, the Kulkarni *vatan* of which was held by a family which rose to great eminence in the days of Bahamanis. Timma Bhat, the son of Bhairon or Bhairav Kulkarni of this family, had probably migrated in his youth to Vijayanagar to escape the persecution to which he was subjected by the Muslims and entered the service of that Kingdom.²⁰ He was captured by Sultan Shah Bahamani in one of his campaigns against Vijayanagar in about 1440 and brought to Bidar, the capital to which the Bahamani rulers had shifted in 1432 from the earlier capital of Gulbarga.²¹ Timma Bhat was converted to Islam, received the name of Hussan and brought up as one of the regal slaves. The Sultan was so struck by his abilities that he made him over to his eldest son, Prince Mahomed, as a kind of companion with whom he was educated and attained eminence in Persian and Arabic literature. From his father's name Bhairon he was called Mullick Bheiro, but the Prince, being unable to pronounce the name correctly, he obtained the appellation Bheiry. When Prince Mahomed ascended the throne he raised his favourite to the rank of a noble of thousand horses.²²

Mullick Hassan's inborn qualities enabled him in course of time to rise to the position of a Mansabdar of 20,000 horses with the title of Mir-i-Shikar, and the privilege of keeping kettle drums, *Mahi-Maratab* and other emblems of distinction. He was subsequently appointed to the post of Qush-Beg. In 1471, he showed exemplary courage against Mangal Rai, defeating him and reinstating

Hamvira on the throne of Orissa, and in conquering Rajahmundry and occupying some forts of Kondavidu.

For these achievements he was honoured with the title of Ashraf-i-Humayun Nizam-ul-Mulk and was appointed as Sarlashkar of Tilangana. He made rapid conquests in Tilangana, subjected that whole country and completed preparations for attacking the Carnatic. In November, 1480, he established his hold over Kondavidu for which he was again honoured with the titles of Masnad-i-Ali and Ulugh-i-Azam and was appointed Governor of Rajahmundry. Thereafter, he accompanied the Sultan in his campaign against Vijayanagar and helped him in reducing the fort of Kanchi. While at Kondapalli on the return march, Malik Hussan successfully brought about the murder of Mahmud Gawan the Dewan of Bahamani Kingdom on 5 April, 1481. The removal of Gawan from the political scene left the direction in the hands of Malik Hussan. He managed the affairs of the state for some years. However, the murder of Mahmud Gawan released disruptive forces. In this atmosphere of tension and hostility, the Provincial Governors won over the local population and began to assert their position. Mullick Hussan found it difficult to control them, and in the end, one of his own proteges murdered him in 1486.

These developments inspired Mullick Hussan's son Ahmed, to push forward his design of carving out an independent principality. He broke into an open rebellion and made up his mind to give a decisive blow to the fast declining political structure. On reaching Junnar he styled himself as Bahri Nizamul-Mulk, opened offensive against his father's enemies and established the Nizamshahi dynasty of Ahmednagar.²³

In 1518, Burhan Nizam Shah I of Ahmednagar demanded of Alauddin Imad, Shah of Berar, cession of town and district of Pathri, then included in Berar kingdom, in exchange for another district on the ground that Pathri was the home of his ancestors and that many of his relatives lived there. On Alauddin's refusal to cede the district Burhan Nizam Shah I made war on him and annexed it.²⁴

Finally, the Mughal forces in Deccan established their domain over the territory of Daulatabad, including Pathri, and ever since Pathri has been a taluka place in Parabhani district. Up to 1853 Parabhani district was a part of Berar. When Berar was ceded to the British it was attached to Marathwada.

Pathri is about 16 kms. from Manvat Road Railway Station on the Manmad-Secunderabad line. When we decided in 1975 summer to camp at Pathri for a few days to get authentic information about Sai Baba's early life, Manvat had come into prominence because of a series of murders which showed diabolical pre-planning. By June we had established links with a family at Pathri who were to be our hosts. Our host was none other than Dinkarrao Vasudeo Chaudhari, a scion of the famous Chaudhari family of Pathri, with a long history behind them. Dinkarrao Chaudhari is a progressive farmer and lawyer. He was a perfect host. He regarded us and our mission as his own and rendered us all assistance.

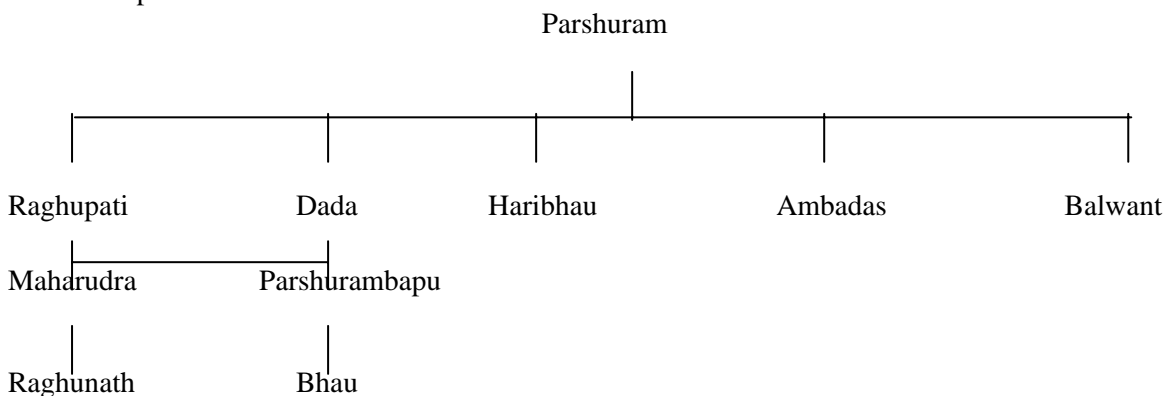
There are a number of branches of Chaudhari family at Pathri but most of them live in the fortress which dates back to about the fourteenth century. Dinkarrao Chaudhari has now constructed a house just outside the fortress where he lives. It was our abode during our halt in Pathri. On 21 June evening, when we sat in the open verandah overlooking the fortress, in an informal conversation, Dinkarrao made a point which caught my attention. He said that years ago, his late father Vasudeorao had pointed to one Bhau Bhusari in Pathri and remarked at the sad plight of the family descendant of Sai Baba!²⁵ The next day, some Muslim clients of Dinkarrao, who had come for consultation, stated that according to their information Sai Baba was born in a Brahmin family of Pathri, but was taken away by a Wali when a child, and what happened later was not known. This also furnished another clue. So we promptly commenced with the task of making a complete list of all Brahmin families of Pathri.

Brahmins in Pathri are all Deshastha Brahmins, either Rigvedi or Yajurvedi. There are no Brahmins of any other sect or sub-caste. This list was made while we made the rounds of Pathri

going from door to door, interviewing all old residents, Brahmins or otherwise. In discussions it came to light that the family deity of most of the Brahmin families in Pathri is either Goddess Renuka of Mahur or Yogeshvari of Ambejogai. There was only one exception. That is Bhusari family. Incidentally, Bhusaris are Shukla Yajurvedi Deshastha Brahmins of the Madhyandin branch and their *gotra* is Kaushik. Their family deity is Hanuman of Kumbharbavdi on the outskirts of Pathri. So our minds began working frantically. We recalled the great devotion and respect Sai Baba had for Rama and Hanuman, and mused, “Could it be that our search had at last borne fruit!” With alacrity we made our way to Vaishnav Lane, where we examined with reverence the ruins of Bhusari House (House No.4-438-61) for it is no longer standing, and proceeded silently to pay our respects to Hanuman of Kumbharbavdi. There is also a “Lendi” stream skirting Pathri and we were reminded of “Lendi Baug” at Shirdi. The association between the two is obvious. Similarity between the Marathi spoken by Sai Baba and the language spoken in Marathwada, generally, was also noticeable. We were most impressed by the fact that the language spoken by all the strata of society, from the lowest to the highest, is uniform, and there is no difference even in the speech of the elite.

The population of Pathri is about ten thousand. In its appearance, Pathri is as it must have been centuries ago. Progress has hardly touched it.²⁶ Only during the last few years electricity has been brought to its doorstep, and link established with the other parts through the State Transport Service. But otherwise life is placid, as it must have been, in the olden days.²⁶ My mind was carried back to the time when Sai Baba was born. No exact date or year of his birth is known. For that matter, there are also differences of opinion about the time of his arrival in Shirdi. According to *Shri Sai Satcharita*, he first came to Shirdi in 1854, vanished and reappeared in 1858, and settled down. According to B.V.Narasimhaswami²⁷ who is supported by M.W. Pradhan²⁸ Sai Baba first arrived in Shirdi in 1872. All that we know is that Sai Baba breathed his last on 15 October, 1918. And one can only guess how old he must have been from photographs of him that are available. Can we then say with reasonable certainty that Sai Baba was born in Bhusari family? Excepting the information given by a prominent citizen of Pathri to his son on the subject, is there any circumstantial evidence? To collect this, if possible, I decided to pursue the matter further. I opened correspondence with Prof. Raghunath Maharudra Bhusari who owns the house of Bhusaris at Pathri. He was Professor of Marathi and also taught Sanskrit at Osmania University, and later served as the Principal of a Government College, from which post he retired in about 1959 and settled down in Hyderabad. He was born in Pathri and had his early education there. When he was eight he lost his father. At the age of twelve he left Pathri and went to Parabhani, a district town, for further education. After matriculating he moved to Hyderabad from where he graduated in Arts, standing third in the University. This won him a scholarship for MA at the Calcutta University, which he completed successfully in 1926 with Sanskrit and Archaeology. There he studied under Dr. Devadatta Ramkrishna Bhandarkar, Ancient Indian History and Civilisation. Thereafter, he also passed with credit the MA exam with Marathi from Nagpur University.

Prof. Bhusari states that Konerdada was their first known ancestor. No information is available about the next two generations, but the family tree of three later generations is known which is reproduced below :



Prof. Bhusari further states that he had learnt from his grandmother, when he was a child, that Haribhau, Ambadas and Balwant had all left Pathri for good. While Haribhau might have gone in

search of God, the latter two had gone to seek their fortune. In the next generation, Parshurambapu had also taken *sanyas* in Manjartha (in Bhir District) which is situated at the confluence of the Godavari and the Sindhufena. He passed away in about 1972. His son Bhau, who was not much educated and died in poverty, was the person about whose condition Vasudeorao Chaudhari had an occasion to speak to his son Dinkarrao. This is sufficient evidence to confirm that the Bhusari family of Pathri has produced persons of higher urges and impulses. Could it not be that Haribhau Bhusari was Sai Baba? I wonder.

The theory advanced above is probable. I discussed it jointly with an experienced lawyer and a reputed historian, and both of them agreed that it could be so. I do not wish to add anything further. I leave the matter to the readers to judge for themselves. Since I decided to pen this article, I have learnt that residents of Pathri are keen to erect a fitting memorial to the sacred memory of Sai Baba. May their efforts be crowned with success.²⁹

Notes and References

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3. Erik H. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., New York, 1969, p.9.
4. B.V. Narasimhaswami, op. cit., p.92.
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7. B.V. Narasimhaswami, op. cit., Part-II, p.46.
8. G.R. Dabholkar, op. cit., (Marathi).
9. Ibid p.1.
10. *Shri Sai Leela, Miscellaneous Topics*, April 1925, p.179.
11. B.V. Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, All India Sai Samaj, Madras, 1955, pp.13-14.
12. Ibid., p.12.
13. Swami Sai Sharan Anand attained *nirvana* at Ahmedabad at twenty minutes past midnight on Wednesday, 25 August, 1982. His body was interred and a *samadhi* erected over it at 14/15 Prakritikunj Society, New Sharada Mandir Road, Ahmedabad – 380 015.
14. *Shri Sai Leela*, September, 1975, p.4 at p.6.
15. Swami Sharan Anand, op. cit., (Gujarati), 1966 (English), 1997.
16. Ibid. (Gujarati), pp. 14-15 (English), pp. 10-11.
17. Ibid. (Gujarati), p.6 (English), p.5.
18. *Shri Sai Leela*, July-September, 1942, pp.359-372.
19. S.B. Dikshit, *Bharatiya Jyotish Shastracha Itihas* (Marathi), Aryabhushan Press, Pune, 2nd Edn., 1931, pp. 267, 269 & 278.
20. Lt. Col. Sir Wolseley Haig, *The History of the Nizamshahi Kings of Ahmednagar*, British India Press, Bombay, 1923, p. 7 (footnote).
21. Prof. H.K. Sherwani & Dr. P.M. Joshi, *History of Mediaeval Deccan (1295-1724)*, Vol.I, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1975, pp. 225-228.
22. Lt. Col. John Brigg, *History of the Rise of Mahomedan Power in India till A.D., 1612*, Vol.III, Longman Rees, Orme, Brown & Green, 1829, pp. 189-90.
23. Prof. H.K. Sherwani & Dr. P.M. Joshi, op. cit., pp. 225-228.
24. Lt. Col. Sir Wolseley Haig, op. cit., p.7 (footnote).
25. See the family tree of Bhusaris in this Research Paper.
26. When the writer visited Pathri in 1993, after thirteen years, he found the face of Pathri considerably transformed. It had lost its rustic appearance and life had been urbanised without any pre-planning. A highway now passes through the town and a sugar factory has come into being, the population has multiplied threefold but development has not kept pace with it.
27. B.V. Narasimhaswami, op. cit., Vol.I, p. 13.
28. M.V. Pradhan, *Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi*, Shri Sai Baba Sansthan, Shirdi, 7th Edn., 1973, p. 25.
29. The place of Shirdi Sai Baba's birth in Pathri was purchased by V.B. Kher and Dinkarrao Chaudhari in the name of Shri Sai Smarak Samiti, Pathri, which has been registered as a public trust at P.T.R. No.E-43 (Parabhani) under the Bombay Public Trusts Act, 1950 . A shrine of Shirdi Sai Baba was inaugurated on Tuesday, 19 October, 1999, Vijayadashami (Dashera) day, by Shri K.V. Ramani, the Founder and Managing Trustee of Shirdi Sai Trust, Chennai, without whose munificent donation the construction of the shrine in its present exquisite form would not have been possible for the Samiti. The shrine comprises a *sanctum sanctorum* with a 5½ foot bronze icon of Shri Sai Baba with his *Padukas* for the purpose of worship, opening into a spacious *sabha-mandap*. A *Dhyan Mandir* (Meditation Hall) is located in the basement of the shrine with a full-size lifelike oil painting of Baba and portraits of Swami Sai Sharan Anand and Bulb Baba on either side. Marble has been extensively used in the construction of the shrine aesthetically.

Shri Sai Satcharita and Jnaneshvari

Shri Sai Satcharita is the *Pothi* or *Gatha* of the *leelas* of Sai Baba. Govind Raghunath Dabholkar, nicknamed as Hemadpant by Sai Baba, was inspired by Sai Baba himself to compose the work, giving the book the stamp of authority. Being based on his own experiences and those of his contemporaries, though authentic to a considerable extent, it is inaccurate in some of the details.

Answers to many pertinent questions about Sai Baba are found in the hallowed text of *Shri Sai Satcharita*. It must not be forgotten, however, that it is more in the nature of 'religious text' and the core of it is in essence a legend rather than historical truth, for Sai Baba had become a legend in his own lifetime. For this reason, historical truth must be searched elsewhere. This is true of all religious texts.

Such is the power of the words used in *Shri Sai Satcharita* to convey his Master's gospel that they mysteriously find their way into the hearts of the readers (listeners). The original work of Hemadpant is composed in Marathi. The author has no other work to his credit except *Shri Sai Satcharita*. Yet this one piece is worth its weight in gold and has earned for him the esteem and gratitude of millions of Sai devotees in India and abroad for all time to come. It runs into 53 chapters and contains 9,308 verses.

Hemadpant was a scholar of Marathi and was familiar with the compositions of mediaeval saints of Maharashtra like Jnaneshvar, Eknath, Ramdas, Tukaram and works like *Gurucharitra*. Though in its character *Shri Sai Satcharita* is comparable only to *Gurucharitra* (a composition on the *leelas* of Nrisimha Saraswati), its style, diction and language have been greatly influenced by *Jnaneshvari* and particularly by *Eknathi Bhagwat*.

Jnaneshvar is the father of the Marathi language and the doyen of the saints of Maharashtra. The remarkable lifestory of this saint who is revered by devotees of Pandharinath as an incarnation of Vishnu has been narrated by Savitribai Khanolkar in her book *Saints of Maharashtra*.¹ Jnanadeva wrote five great works : *Jnaneshvari*, *Anubhavamrit*, *Abhangas*, *Changdeva Pasasthi* and *Haripath*. *Jnaneshvari* is a classic commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* which Jnaneshvar composed at the age of fifteen according to some and at nineteen according to others. For the sheer breadth of vision, its absolute metaphysic and exalted thought process, there is hardly any work in any language comparable to the *Jnaneshvari*. *Anubhavamrit*, an independent treatise on Advaita philosophy, is one of the greatest philosophical works in Marathi literature.²

The *Jnaneshvari* contains 9,032 *ovis* (verses) by way of commentary on 700 *shlokas* (stanzas) in the *Bhagavad Gita*. A table giving information about the number of stanzas in the 18 chapters of the *Gita* and the corresponding number of verses in the *Jnaneshvari* is given below :

The *Jnaneshvari* has been translated into English by Vitthal Ganesh Pradhan who died in 1950. The manuscript was brought to the notice of the Indian National Commission by his daughter, Ms. Lila Pradhan, in 1955. This rendering was later edited by Ms. H.M. Lambert, of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and published by George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, in 1967 in the UNESCO collection of representative works – India Series. Since writing this article two more English translations of the *Jnaneshvari* have become available : one by M.R. Yardi, I.C.S (Retd.), published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Mumbai,² and the second by Chandrasekharan Pillai which was featured in *The Vision*, the *Shri Sai Satcharita and Jnaneshvari* mouthpiece of Anandashram, P.O. Anandashram-671 531, Kanhangad, Kerala. The last instalment appeared in the April, 1999 issue of *The Vision*.

S.No.	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> No. of stanzas	<i>Jnaneshvari</i> No. of verses
1	47	275
2	72	375
3	43	276
4	42	225
5	29	180
6	47	497
7	30	210
8	28	271
9	34	535
10	42	335
11	55	708
12	20	247
13	34	1169
14	27	415
15	20	598
16	24	473
17	28	433
18	78	1810
Total	18	700
		9032

At the beginning of *Shri Sai Satcharita* in Marathi, selections from the *Jnaneshvari* have been reproduced. For the benefit of non-Marathi *Shri Sai Satcharita* readers we give below from the UNESCO publication selections from the *Jnaneshvari* entreating the attention of listeners and the prayer for benediction at the conclusion of the work.

ENTREATY TO THE LISTENERS

56. "As the young of the chakora bird³ picks up the tender and luscious drops of nectar falling from the moon of the Sharada⁴ season,
57. "So should hearers enjoy this story with dispassionate and gentle minds.
58. "It should be pondered over silently, enjoyed apart from any action of the senses and thus its truths may be grasped (by the inner Self).
63. "I say this with affection, and touching your feet, O Sirs, I call upon you, for (I know) you feel reverence in your hearts.
64. "As it is the nature of parents to be all the more pleased when the child lisps out his words,
65. "So have you good men accepted me as your own; why then should I beseech you when I know you will overlook my shortcomings?
67. "In my eagerness I have thoughtlessly undertaken this work; would a glow-worm show its light in the presence of the sun?
68. "As the titibha bird tries to sound the depth of the sea with its tiny beak, so with little knowledge I am setting out on this task.
69. "Listen! In order to encompass the sky one must be greater than it; so really speaking it (to expound the *Gita*) is beyond my capacity.
74. "Who can grasp the infinite, or illuminate the great light? How could an insect hold the firmament in its grasp?
75. "But in this matter there is one source of strength, through which I may speak with confidence. So says Jnanadeva.
76. "But for this I would be a fool. Though I have been thoughtless, the light of the grace of the saints enlightens me.
77. "It is the property of the philosopher's stone to turn iron into gold; so also the dead regain life through the power of nectar.
78. "If Saraswati herself were to appear to him, a dumb man would obtain the gift of speech. Is this any cause for wonder? This is but the nature of such power.

79. "Can anything be unobtainable for one whose mother is Kamadhenu?"⁵ For this reason I have set out to expound this work.
80. "I beseech you, therefore, to add whatever may be found deficient, and to reject what may be superfluous.
81. "Now, I beg of you, pay heed to me; what you inspire in me I will speak, as the puppet dances when moved by a cord.
82. "Blessed be your grace. I am obedient to the saints; make me therefore whatever you please."

JNANESHVARI, CHAPTER –1

- 561/594 "When those without understanding see the *shevanti* plant they think little of it; but the bee which sucks its honey knows its fragrance.
- 562/595 "So you should accept whatever appeals to you, giving back to me what is deficient for ignorance is a natural characteristic of a child.
- 563/596 "A child's parents delight in it endlessly and fondle it although it has no knowledge.
- 564/597 "So you, O saints, are my parental home, and when I see you I should be treated with affection; accept this book as a token of my love for you.
- 565/598 "Jnanadeva says, O Nivrattinath, my perceptor, accept my worship in the form of these words."⁶

JNANESHVARI, CHAPTER-15 PRAYER FOR BENEDICTION

- 1772/1793 "Now may the Soul of the universe be pleased with this sacrifice of words and in His satisfaction bestow His favour on me.
- 1773/1794 "May the wickedness of sinners cease, may their desire for good deeds increase and may all beings live in harmony with each other."
- 1774/1795 "May the darkness of sin disappear, may this universe see the rise of the sun of righteousness, and may the desires of all creatures be satisfied,
- 1775/1796 "May all men meet ceaselessly with the company of saints devoted to the Supreme, who shower down blessings on them,
- 1776/1797 "Saints who are walking gardens full of trees of desire⁷, living villages of stones of desire⁸ and speaking words like oceans of nectar.
- 1777/1798 "They are moons without blemish and suns without heat; may these saints be the friends of all men.
- 1778/1799 "May all men be filled with joy in all worlds, forever worshipping Brahma.
- 1779/1800 "May all those in this world to whom this book is their very life be blessed with success in this world and the next.
- 1780/1801 "Then the great master, Nivrattinath, said, 'This blessing will be granted.' This brought great joy to Jnaneshvar.

Notes and References

1. *The Saints of Maharashtra*, is published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay. The author, Savitri Khanolkar, Eva, as she was known before her marriage, was born to a Russian mother and a Hungarian father. She acquired Indian citizenship after her marriage to Major General Vikram R. Khanolkar. She speaks Marathi like a native and is proficient in Sanskrit and Hindi. Besides her mothertongue she knows English, French and Italian. She is an initiate of a direct disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. 156 *Shri Sai Satcharita and Jnaneshvari* 157
2. Ranade R.D., *Pathway to God in Marathi Literature*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1961.
3. *Chakora* bird – A bird similar to the partridge, said to subsist on moonbeams.
4. *Sharada* - One of the six seasons of the Hindu year, approximately from mid-September to mid-November.
5. The desire-fulfilling cow. The 'Kamadhenu' is the mythical cow which fulfils all desires.
6. Two sets of numbers of *Jnaneshvari* are given. Those on the left of the oblique refer to the number in Rajwade's edition of *Jnaneshvari* used by Pradhan for his English translation and those on the right of the oblique refer to the Marathi edition of Sonopant Dandekar, first published in 1953.
7. Kalpataru – the desire-fulfilling tree.
8. Chintamani – the desire-fulfilling stone.

***ELEVEN SOLEMN PROMISES AS PLEDGED BY BABA
FOR MATERIAL SUCCESS, PROSPERITY &
HAPPINESS***

1. Whoever comes to my abode, their suffering will come to an end once and for all.
2. The helpless will experience plenty of joy, happiness and fulfilment as soon as they climb the steps of the Dwaraka Mayee.
3. I am ever vigilant to help and guide all those who come to me, who surrender to me and seek refuge in me.
4. There shall be no dearth of any kind in the houses of my devotees. I shall fulfil all their wishes.
5. If you look to me, I shall look to you and take care of all your needs.
6. If you seek my advice and help, it shall be given to you at once.
7. If you cast your burdens onto me, I shall surely take them on and relieve you of them.
8. I shall be ever active and vigorous even after casting away my body.
9. I shall respond and act in human form and continue to work for my devotees from my tomb.
10. My mortal remains will speak, execute and discharge all the needs of my devotees.
11. My tomb shall bless, speak and fulfil the innumerable needs of my devotees.

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