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Shri Sai Satcharita, basically, contains the life history of Shri Shirdi Sai Baba, His sayings and the philosophy He propagated during His long stay at Shirdi of over five decades. The author, Annasaheb Govind Raghunath Dhabolkar (titled Hemadpant by Shri Sai Baba), had written this book in the traditional 'Ovi' verse style of composition in Marathi language following the pattern of the renowned "Eknathi Bhagavat". It contains fifty three chapters of 9,308 verses (Ovis) and, is commonly referred to as "Pothi".

As mentioned in this book, Annasaheb Dhabolkar first came to Shirdi to meet Baba in the year 1908. In 1910, he approached Baba with a wish to codify the anecdotes ("leelas") pertaining to His life and sayings. Due to his domestic and professional responsibilities, he could not write much till his retirement in 1916. By October 1918 (Baba's Mahasamadhi), he could complete only two chapters out of the fifty three chapters that the published book contains. In these two chapters he could only narrate some of the day to day activities (including certain anecdotes) and highlights of Shri Sai Baba as spiritual Guru.

The actual writing of the book commenced in the Hindu calendar month of "Chaitra" (April) in 1922. In the Hindu calendar month of "Jyestha" (July), 1929 Shri Sai Satcharita was completed. However, in Chapter 52, the "Avatarnika" i.e, Table of Contents or Review was not added to it, though one finds a reference of the same in the main body of the book. After the death of Annasaheb Dhabolkar in July 1929, Balkrishna Dev wrote and added the fifty third chapter to the book.

Shri Sai Satcharita was first published in a book form by Ramchandra Atmaram Tarkhad, an ardent devotee of Baba, on November 26, 1930 and the rights were vested with Shri Sai Baba Sansthan Trust, Shirdi. Later it was translated verse to verse in Gujarati, Telugu and Kannada. Adapted versions

are available in English, Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Urdu, Gujarati, Sindhi, Bengali, Odia, Marathi, etc. In 1944, Nagesh Vasudev Gunaji an eminent scholar from Belgaum adapted and translated it into English titled as Shri Sai Satcharita and donated the proceeds to Shri Sai Baba Sansthan Trust, Shirdi.

As is evident, Annasaheb Dhabolkar alias Hemadpant first came to Shirdi in 1908 and thereafter used to pay frequent visits to Shirdi till the Mahasamadhi of Baba in 1918. It appears that that before 1908, he did not have any direct connection with Baba or Shirdi. Maybe he had knowledge of Baba on hearsay basis. Such hearsay based information cannot be taken as primary data for the purpose of authentication following the research methodology. He had the facility of having limited interactions with Baba and direct knowledge of activities related to Baba in Shirdi only during his brief visits to Shirdi. In Shri Sai Satcharita, one can find only a few anecdotes relating to his interactions with Baba during his stay in Shirdi. The other anecdotes, mentioned in Shri Sai Satcharita, pertaining to other devotees at different points of time are based on the statements made by those devotees to Annasaheb Dhabolkar.

Even if we consider some of these as primary data for the purpose of authentication, some others seem to be hearsay in nature. This is so because by the end of 1918, only two out of the fifty three chapters were written even though the writer had taken consent of Baba to write the book in the year 1910. After receiving the consent of Baba, he started jotting down the experiences of other devotees and continued to do so even after Baba left his physical embodiment and till his death in 1929. This book, in its quintessence, is a compilation of experiences of devotees, who had direct communication with Shirdi Sai Baba, including those of the writer from time to time. Presumably, he had finished fifty two chapters out of fifty three chapters by the time of his death. The last chapter was written after him by Balakrishna Dev.

My hypothesis is that beyond Shri Sai Satcharita there exists a lot of material that include the anecdotes of Baba which are available in the public domain. Some references are mentioned below as an easy reckoner for the ardent and inquisitive devotees:

- Shri Sainatha Prabha, a bilingual magazine published from Pune by Dakshina Bhiksha Samithi during 1916-1919,
- Bhakta Leelamrit and Santha Kathamrit written by Das Ganu in Marathi,

- Sainatha Bhajan Maala written by Mrs. Savitribai Raghunath Tendulkar in Marathi,
- the personal diary of Shri G. S. Kharparde which contains his memoirs covering the intermittent visits to Shirdi till Baba was there and thereafter,
- Gujarati book by Sri Amidas Bhavani Mehta,
- an account of devotees of Sai Baba published in English newspaper in 1916,
- Sai Leela, the official magazine of Shri Sai Baba Sansthan published with effect from April 1923 which continues till date,
- many other small and big Marathi publications in the form of books, booklets and magazines on Baba,
- some recent publications authored by Sai Devotees have quoted anecdotes in their books pertaining to Baba which are not found in Shri Sai Satcharita,
- further many writers in their books have given extra information and anecdotes which Dhabolkar had not picked up. They have obviously picked up their information from other sources than Shri Sai Satcharita and a lot of information is also available on various websites and Internet.

The name and fame of Shri Sai Baba is no more limited to Shirdi, Maharashtra or India. It has gone global. There is exponential growth in the number of devotees and temples in the world. In this backdrop, it behooves the research minded Sai devotees to come up with new materials, pertaining to the hitherto, unpublished aspects of Baba's philosophy, sayings and anecdotes. There is lot of scope to undertake research on this subject. Jai Shri Sai.

MAY SHRI SAI BLESS US ALL

Jai Shri Sai.

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