



## GURUPURNIMA MESSAGE 2006

Ever since the phenomenon of Shri Shirdi Sai extensively caught public attention in India and outside, there has been a relentless stream of speculation as well as concerted effort on the question of His parentage i.e. whether he was born a Hindu or a Muslim. The net result of such research by different researchers has turned out to be either speculative or controversial since it is based more on circumstantial evidence as opposed to primary data. However, my efforts are channelised into finding out who and what Baba is rather than what was His parentage or where he was born.

There can be no denial in any quarter that Shri Shirdi Sai Baba is a divine personality of the highest order who demonstrated magnificent qualities of selfless service to all, who came in contact with Him, without least consideration of His self. He was not constrained by the limitations of any organized religion or path as is amply evidenced by His acceptance of disciples from all religions, cultures, castes and paths etc. There was no question of economic and social differentiation in His scheme of things. Besides non-possession and non-attachment, he was divinely magnanimous and empathetic towards the poorest of the poor among His devotees, as well as animals and birds. He also possessed wonderful powers of miracles, which he often used to help His disciples in distress, even at distant places.

Given this universal theme of His approach, one can safely conclude that Shri Sai demonstrated the highest qualities of Hinduism, notwithstanding whether He was born of Hindu or Muslim parentage.

When one speaks of Hinduism at first one has to understand as to what Hinduism stands for in its essence. Some historians comment that the word 'Hindu' was originally 'Indu' coming out of 'Indus valley civilization' but some foreigners called it Hindu like 'Hindukush' mountain. Hinduism in its quintessence is more a way of life than merely being a Hindu path of worship of deities. It prescribes numerous paths to its people and leaves them free to choose any one. It prescribes a number of divine forms (Devatas/Devis) to be worshipped and also the worship of the formless (Brahman – the ultimate God).

Hinduism does not insist on the conversion of others to its fold and failing which their extinction. It has never believed in religious expansionism with the help of sword. This highest level of tolerance has led to the absorption of many conquering or colonizing races, following different paths, into its all embracing fold. Sufism, which truly believes in the unity of souls and tolerance among people following different paths, therefore, found a strong base in India – the soil of Hindus.

Basically what Shri Shirdi Sai Baba practiced and taught is spiritualism and humanism as against bigotry, obscurantism and intolerance. To that extent He was a genuine Hindu and genuine Sufi amalgamated together. He often used to say 'Allah Malik hai' or 'Ishwar Achha karega' or 'Sabka Malik ek hai' i.e., the one and ultimate God called Ishwar or Allah is the sovereign power who controls everyone and everything. This is the monistic "Advaitya" philosophy of the Hindus. On the other hand, He never deterred His Hindu devotees from going to temples to worship any deity of their faith or stopped the Muslims from taking out the Tazia procession or doing anything prescribed by their religion etc. Indeed He encouraged both and ensured, at Shirdi, tolerance towards the religious sentiments of devotees practicing various faiths, through mutual participation in each others festivals. Not only for the residents of Shirdi but also for the outsiders who used to visit Him in great numbers, He was not only a Guru but a part of their entire existence. Shri Sai had permeated into all aspects of their lives – religion, family, festivals, way of earning and spending, social conduct, moral conduct, cultural activities, births and deaths, diseases and cures and even regarding the rearing of their children and pets. Baba's influence has been so strong and wide that even two to three generations of a family would come together to seek His blessings and advice on varied matters at Shirdi. Every one looked up to Him as a God in human form and also as the head of the family and surrendered to Him. The way of life not only for the natives of Shirdi, but those visiting Him, metamorphosized to a new way of looking at life which Baba taught them through His conduct and precepts. Thus, like Hinduism, the path shown by Shri Sai has become a way of life for His devotees rather than a religious and ritualistic path alone. Even today the same Sai spirit pervades the lives of millions.

This is what explains the unimaginable expansion of the Sai path not only in India, but in other countries. Shri Sai remains, as promised by Him, a living Master, with His all-pervasive spirit that controls the entire life of His devotees. Such a magnificent, universal and time-less divine personality is termed as "Vasudeva" in Hinduism. And the spirit of Shri Vasudeva is eternal.