

An inquiry into Transpersonal Psychology of Shirdi Sai Baba

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Abstract

The present paper opens the door to many questions. Almost a century ago, a saint, sadhu or fakir came in Shirdi and is popularly named as 'Sai'; Shirdi Sai Baba. His philosophy (though not mentioning the miracles and spiritual course) runs parallel to what now 'transpersonal psychology' means. His stay at Shirdi and interaction with villagers over the years has displayed his modern thinking; also it would not be wrong in saying that he was truly a counsellor; whom people seek for help, aid and suggestion. Thus, this present paper is in a growing line of research that attempts to draw relationships between core beliefs of Shirdi Sai Baba (eastern) and transpersonal psychology (western) theories - the common heritage points to another feature i.e. focus on empathy, philanthropic behavior and lessons of life.

Keywords: *Shirdi Sai Baba, Eastern philosophy, Transpersonal Psychology*

Introduction

The aim of this present paper is to introduce Shirdi Sai Baba as the researcher believes that Baba has made a number of important observations of psychological states that have gone without being seen and that these observations have relevance to psychology in general, clinical and positive psychology in particular. The intention is to set down a clear, reasonably comprehensive summary of Sai Baba's contribution to transpersonal psychology. Thus, it can be said that it is an attempt to integrate eastern philosophy into western psychology so as to understand how it paves way towards holistic understanding to what we call i.e. applied psychology.

Looking at what defines transpersonal psychology, themes like states of consciousness, highest or ultimate potential, beyond ego or self, transcendence and spiritual are most frequently quoted, as said by Lajoie & Shapiro (1992b). Also, Sutich (1976) proposed that human beings shared an identity greater than the sum of their individual egos. They were Maslow (1969b) and Sutich (1976) who launched the "fourth force", i.e. transpersonal, psychology. Hartelius, Caplan & Rardin (2007) conducted a retrospective analysis of definitions of transpersonal psychology and found three dominant themes that define the field: beyond-ego psychology, integrative/holistic psychology, and psychology of transformation. Lastly, Caplan (2009) conveys the genesis i.e. transpersonal psychologists attempt to integrate timeless wisdom with modern Western psychology and translate spiritual principles into scientifically grounded, contemporary language. Transpersonal psychology addresses the full spectrum of human psychospiritual development – from our deepest wounds and needs, to the existential crisis of the human being, to the most transcendent capacities of our consciousness.

Biographical sketch

Baba came to village Shirdi in Maharashtra at age of sixteen for the first time. People wondered looking at him that a boy at a very tender age doing deep meditation sitting in asana under a Neem tree, without food and even water for several days. This made to grow lots of curiosity on young Baba. Baba pointed towards the neem tree and asked to dig it to roots. The villagers followed the words of Baba and started digging it. As the layers of earth passed on, they found a slab made of stone, oil lamps glowing without any oil and air too. Baba clarified that this is the holy place where his guru had done penance. He also suggested that instead of worshipping me (Sai Baba), worship the tree and leave it untouched. Till today no one touched it. This tree is the first stop of a pilgrim in Shirdi.

In the year of 1858, Baba returned to Shirdi permanently. For about five years of time Baba took his accommodation under the neem tree and very often Baba used to wander in the jungle near Shirdi was very uncommunicative as Baba spent lot of his time in meditation. Gradually Baba shifted his accommodation to a nearby mosque. Many Hindus and Muslims were visiting Baba. In

the mosque Baba maintained sacred fire which was called dhuni. Baba gave sacred ash to the entire visitor. People believe that ash is the best medicine to heal for all health issues. Baba himself did not put any of his teachings or thoughts into writing. It is written in "Sai Satcharita"- the holy book. This summation is authored by Hemadpant a devotee close to Sai Baba.

Sai Baba's Philosophy And Transpersonal Psychology

- His main teachings includes the following facets, but the essence of his psychology were two major words, which were just not words but elucidated faith in Him; i.e. "SHRADDHA" and "SABURI", meaning thereby firm faith and patience in one's Guru or God shall help pass through all sorts of difficulties in one's life. Shraddha and saburi have much in common, researcher calls it as 'elixir', the additive impact of these two elixirs is i.e. the first and foremost evidence comes from the fact that shraddha and saburi are at everyone's disposal. Secondly, If you look at the cycle of grieving, you will see that saburi is the fundamental stage to experience shraddha and the joy of life again. Thirdly, it shares a common and fundamental component - of empathy and philanthropic behavior. These elixirs produce well-being through a combination of reflection, positive emotions, and adaptive social behaviours that facilitate well-being and happiness. SHRADDHA, elucidated in Sai Satcharita, CHAPTER XV (page 85)

"If you spread your palms with devotion before Me, I am immediately with you, day and night. Though, I am here physically, still I know what you do beyond the seven seas. Go wherever you wish, over the wide world, I am with you. My abode is in your heart and I am within you. Always worship Me, Who is seated in your heart as well as in the hearts of all beings".

- SABURI captured in Sai Satcharita, CHAPTER XVIII & XIX (page 98) is as follows: This Saburi will ferry you across the sea of this mundane existence. Saburi removes all sins and afflictions, gets rid of calamities in various ways, and casts aside all fear, and ultimately, gives you success. Saburi is the mine of virtues, consort of good thought". Nishtha (faith) and Saburi (patience) are like twin sisters, loving each other very intimately".
- LOVE and respect all RELIGIONS; whether Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, all are one in his eyes. Phrases like "ALLAH MALIK" and "RAM JI BHALA KAREIN" were shared with all. Hindus and Muslims, Gods/gurus of Hindus and Muslims is the one, emphasized by Baba in Sai Satcharita, CHAPTER VI, (page 36).

"Transformation of Urus into Ram Navami Festival. It is to be noted that both the Hindus and Mohammedens have been working in unison, in both the processions during the entire festival, and there has been no confrontation or quarrel between them at all so far. First about 5000- 7000 people used to gather, but that figure went up to 75,000 in some years, still, there was no outbreak of any epidemic disease nor any riots worth the name during past so many years".

- Baba LOVED and cared ALL ANIMALS- be it dog, cow, buffalo, lizard, birds all- this was his teaching to people in general i.e. to look after animals and give them live and care. It is captured in Sai Satcharita, CHAPTER IX, (page 56)

"The dog, which you saw before meals and to which you gave the piece of bread, is one with Me, so also other creatures (cats, pigs, flies, cows etc.) are one with Me. I am roaming in their forms. He, who sees Me in all these creatures, is My beloved. So, abandon the sense of duality and distinction, and serve Me as you did today."

- His place of stay at Shirdi, called "DWARAKAMAI", Masjid where Baba stayed, is known as "Mai" i.e. mother; such was his regard for Goddesses females. Dwarakamai was such a holy place people would overcome all their troubles, worries and pain regarding anything and everything in

life- hence such are our mothers who would not let any difficulty come close to her children. CHAPTER XVI (page 91) elucidates:

“My treasury is full and I can give anyone, what he wants, but I have to see, whether he is qualified to receive My gift. If you listen to Me carefully, you will be certainly benefitted. While sitting in this Masjid I never speak any untruth.”

Also, CHAPTER III (page 13) Motherly Love of Sai Baba narrated as:

“Everybody knows, how a cow loves her infant calf. Her udder is always full and when the calf wants milk and dashes at the udder, out comes the milk in an unceasing flow. Similarly, a human mother knows the wants of her child before-hand and feeds him, at her breast in time. In case of dressing and adorning the child, the mother takes particular care to see that, this is well done. The love of the mother is peculiar, extraordinary and disinterested, and has no parallel. Sadgurus feel this motherly love towards their disciples”.

- All RELIGIONS ARE ONE, this belief and understanding can help in TIMES OF CRISES AND keep us UNITED. Also, Sai Baba’s advice that would stand us all in good stead both in material and spiritual matters was captured in CHAPTER X (page 59) Baba’s advice is mentioned below: “His constant advice to all was to this effect. “Ram (the God of the Hindus) and Rahim (the God of the Mohammedans) were one and the same; there was not the slightest difference between them then, why should their devotees fall out and quarrel among themselves? You ignorant folk, join hands and bring both the communities together, act sanely and thus, you will gain your object of national unity. It is not good to dispute and argue”.
- He/ his TEACHINGS NEVER IMPOSED on people like going through RIGOROUS PRACTICES to visit temple daily, fasting, impede onion and garlic, to light diya, candle etc and to perform any kind of grand pujas etc. Further, being a saint never believed in taking money or materialistic gifts in lieu of helping people, rather he was dependent on villagers for his diet. CHAPTER XVIII & XIX (page 98) of Sai Satcharita, it mentions the following:

“Do not try to get Mantra or Upadesh from anybody. Make Me the sole object of your thoughts and actions and you will, no doubt, attain Paramartha (the spiritual goal of life). Look at Me wholeheartedly and I, in turn, look at you. Sitting in this Masjid, I speak the truth, nothing but the truth. No Sadhana or proficiency in the six Shastras, is necessary. Have faith and confidence in your Guru. Believe that, Guru is the sole Actor or Doer. Blessed is he, who knows the greatness of his Guru and thinks him to be Hari1, Hara2 and Brahma3 (Trimurti) Incarnate”.

CHAPTER XX, (page 20) portrays that it is not important to go far off places to please God, it can be done anywhere by simply being at your home too.

“The Hindus think that, a bath in the holy Tirth of Prayag, where the Ganga and Yamuna meet, is very meritorious and thousands of pilgrims go there periodically, to have the sacred bath there.

Once, Das Ganu thought that, he should go to Prayag for a bath and came to Baba to get His permission for doing so. Baba replied to him, “It is not necessary to go so far. Our Prayag is here, believe Me!”

CHAPTER XXXII (page 173) of Sai Satcharita emphasized why not to fast?

“Baba never fasted Himself, nor did He allow others to do so. The mind of the person who fasts is never at ease, then how could he attain his Paramartha (goal of life)? God is not attained on an empty stomach; first the soul has to be appeased. If there be no food in the stomach and nutrition, with what eyes should we see God, with what tongue should we describe His greatness and with what ears should we hear the same? In short, when all our organs get their proper nutrition and are

sound, we can practise devotion and other Sadhanas to attain God. Therefore, neither fasting nor over-eating is good. Moderation in diet is really wholesome, both to the body and mind”.

- Cleanliness of our surroundings is of utmost importance, so that all are healthy and disease free; emphasized to have boiled water, simple food like khichdi and also to eat in moderation. Like we must remember to have as required for our living and on special occasions also, one must have in optimum as one can FEED THE NEEDY AND POOR too if saved by us. It would quench someone’s thirst and satiate appetite. CHAPTER XVIII & XIX (page 100, 101) Baba’s advice regarding our behaviour clearly stated that,

“If any men or creatures come to you, do not discourteously drive them away but receive them well, and treat them with due respect. Shri Hari (God) will be certainly pleased, if you give water to the thirsty, bread to the hungry, clothes to the naked and your Verandah to strangers for resting”.

- Bizarre were Baba’s ways of helping people Sigmund Freud in his book “Interpretations of Dreams” (1990) stated that dreams are the royal road to unconscious mind, this statement stands true in Sai Baba’s case too as He would know what is going on in his/her unconscious mind, so he would come into their dreams and guide people with their issues. He could foresee which of his devotees is going through which problem and by coming in their dreams paved way to its resolution. Sai Baba in simple words elaborated how to attain brahma-gyan which relates to the story of a rich gentleman, who wanted Brahma-gnyan, quickly from Sai Baba. CHAPTER XVI & XVII (page 89, 90) Quick Brahma-gnyan. Out of ten important principles, fourth principle pinpoints to what SIGMUND FREUD’s CATHARSIS said i.e. pent out all emotions so that one is free and gets cured simply talking away.

“Catharsis – (eliminating all base ideas and emotions) – Unless a man has turned away from wickedness and stopped from doing wrong, and has entirely composed himself, and unless his mind is at rest, he cannot gain self-realization even by means of knowledge”.

Further, sixth principle is related to what Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalysis Id (PLEASURE PRINCIPLE) and Superego (MORALITY PRINCIPLE) STRUCTURE OF PERSONALITY signify. CHAPTER XVI & XVII page 89, 90 *Quick Brahma-gnyan* is stated below.

“Preferring Shreyas (the good), to Preyas (the pleasant) – There are two sorts of things, viz. the good and the pleasant; the former deals with spiritual affairs, and the latter with mundane matters. Both these are open to man for acceptance. He has to think and choose one of them. The wise man prefers the good to the pleasant, but the unwise, through greed and attachment chooses the pleasant”.

Further, CHAPTER XX (page 108) puts forwards as a unique method of teaching by Baba i.e. dreams. It is as follows:

“To some He appeared in His usual form, to some He appeared in waking or dream states, day or night, and satisfied their desires. It is impossible to describe all the methods, that Baba used in imparting instructions to His Bhaktas”.

- Such was his philosophy—so simple, easy, relatable. LOVE, COMPASION, GRARTITUDE, FORGIVENESS, RESPECT and appreciate so that nobody hates and envy of others, as if we believe this fact that BABA RESIDES IN ALL OF US, he is omnipresent, then we shall think before hurting, being greedy and envious of others, thus budding seeds of kindness and equality. Helping people understand the value of money; being miser and extravagant both were so well put together by Baba, MODERATION IS THE KEY told by him. CHAPTER XLIII (page 230) Baba’s words clearly elucidates on this, mentioned below:

“You need not go far in search of Me. Barring your name and form, there exists in you as well as in all beings, a sense of Being or Consciousness of Existence. That is Myself. Knowing this, you see Me inside yourself, as well as in all beings. If you practise this, you will realize all-pervasiveness, and thus attain oneness with Me.” “He, who carps and cavils at others, pierces Me in the heart and injures Me, but he that suffers and endures, pleases Me most.”

- He emphasised on being EDUCATED and literate so that one can make one's living therefore encouraged to have a SCHOOL so that children get involved in teaching learning experience. He didn't want children to just study, rather promote play too and other extra curricular activities like painting, carpentry, pottery and taking part in ramleela and getting to know the relevance of festival like Dusshera and the significance of the fact that good prevails over evil, thus reflecting on holistic development of children. Also, focused on GARDENING- flowers, trees, fruits, and also special medicinal herbs that help us in times of pain and that how environment is so important for us. CHAPTER XXXII (page 131) is captured with the importance of school and having a Guru or teacher in one's life is so important.

"Such was the school! No one who entered it once, could return empty-handed. My Guru became My all-in-all, My home, mother and father, everything. All My senses left their places, and concentrated themselves in My eyes, and My sight was centred on him".

CHAPTER V (page 25) narrates; Baba's fondness of plants and gardening:

"When He went to Rahata (3 miles from Shirdi), He brought with Him small plants of Merrigold, Jai and Jui, and after cleaning them He planted and watered them. Sai Baba's toil and effort, there grew a garden".

Conclusion

This paper has summarized some of Shirdi Sai Babab's viewpoints on faith, life, love for all- humans and animals, compassion, gratitude, relationships and most important unity. The researcher has attempted to explain within the context of transpersonal psychology. McLain's (2011) recent ethnographic research highlights stories of individuals whose daily lives are touched by the perpetual presence of Shirdi Sai Baba. As such its importance and relevance to general, clinical and positive psychology should not be overlooked. In particular, the researcher suggests that the therapeutic relevance of this phenomenology should not be considered as a set of techniques like psychoanalysis or cognitive behavior therapy, but as learning through following Baba.

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