

**A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH OF GURUDEV H. H. NARASIMHA SWAMIJI  
(As appeared in Shri Sai Leela May – June 1993)**

**Introduction - Swamiji's early life - Public career - Turn in life - His search for a Sadguru - Becoming a Sai devotee - Foundation of all India Sai Samaj - Sai-prachar - Narasimha Swamiji's Mahasamadhi**

His Holiness Sri Narasimha Swamiji is a blessed and saintly soul, who had the immense sowbhagya of being mysteriously drawn to Samartha Sadguru Shirdi Sai Baba. He dedicated his entire life and energies to the task of ceaseless and vigorous propagation of the life and teachings of Sri Sai Baba. He has made the name and fame of Sai Baba to countless numbers of fortunate people

throughout India. He expressed his indebtedness to his Guru Sri Sainath Maharaj as follows: "Everything needs Guru's Grace. I feel forlorn in Sai-love. I have surrendered my all to that living Chaitanya."

**EARLY LIFE AND CAREER**

Narasimha (later on popularly 'known as Sri Narasimha Swamiji) was bom on 21st August, 1874 in an orthodox Brahmin family at Bhavani in Coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu. His parents were Sri B. Venkatagiri Iyer and Smt. Angachi Ammal. He had a brilliant educational career. After he had finished matriculation in Salem, he went to Madras for collegiate education. He passed B.A. and B.L. from Madras Christian college and Madras Law College respectively. He returned to Salem in 1895 and straightway he joined the bar and began to practice law at Salem. As an advocate, Sri Narasimha Iyer revealed his honesty, efficiency and helpful nature to the people by arguing cases in a calm manner in the court. He was dead against the wasteful and ruinous expenditure that litigation had caused among the poor and illiterate. He, therefore, settled many a dispute by arbitration without fee or any commitment to the clients. He was always ready to render his service to the poor and deserving people and also for any public cause.

B. V. Narasimha Iyer's unassuming simplicity, integrity and helpful nature won for him great regard from the public. At that time, Salem Municipality needed an efficient and honest administrator. He was called upon to serve as the chairman of the Salem Municipality. The rare legal acumen and eloquence that he showed in dealing cases, brought him success, large number of clients, princely income and powerful influence. Soon he was elected the chairman of Salem Cooperative Bank. He married Sow Scethalakshmi and had a happy family with sons and daughters. He settled in family with high income, happy home and comfortable life, at the same time performing regular poojas and offering prayers to God.

**PUBLIC CAREER**

Not content with acquiring amassing wealth as a lawyer he interested himself in all the public activities and movements of the day. In politics, he was a great admirer and follower of Sri Bal Gangadhar TiJak. In 1912, he was elected to be a member of the Madras Legislative Council to represent Salem, Coimbatore and Nilgiris districts.

He continued to be the member till 1920. He was the first Indian member to address the Legislative Council in the regional language. As a member of the Indian National Congress, he vigorously presented the national view point on all issues, that came up for consideration before the council. He was an active member of the Home Rule League, started by Mrs. Annie Bcsant. He was one of the three persons sent to Britain in 1917 to place India's case for Home Rule before the British people. He was re-elected to the Legislative Council in 1920 for another term; but he refused the seat. He resigned his membership in the Madras Legislative Council in 1920 in pursuance of the non-co-operation movement, started by Mahatma Gandhi. Among the prominent national leaders and contemporaries of Sri B. V. Narasimha Iyer were Sri C. Rajagopalachari, popularly known as Rajaji and Sri C. Vijaya Raghavachari. Both were from Salem.

Sri B. V. Narasimha Iyer became a prominent figure in the public life of Madras. His lectures drew large crowds. He was the first leader to conceive the idea of mass contact and visit the rural area to create the political awakening of the masses. Later on the congress working committee adopted it in a nation wide scale. Sri B. V. Narasimha Iyer and Mr. George Joseph were asked to impress the liberals, who were contesting the election in Britain. Their purpose was to stress the grant of political freedom of India. They sailed by the cape route to evade observation at Suez Canal. When the authorities came to know it, they arrested Narasimha Iyer and George Joseph in Gibraltar and sent them back to India.

### **TURN IN LIFE**

In 1921, Sri B. V. Narasimha Iyer decided to give up his legal practice and withdraw from political and social activities following a series of domestic calamities. Two of his children Jayaram and Savitri, who were playing in the garden, accidentally fell into the well and were drowned. This was a great shock to him and it took nearly 4 years to subside, though he could not overcome from the grief completely. Meanwhile he had educated the other sons and made them stand on their own legs and live on their income. His surviving daughters Rajalakshmi and Sharadamai had already been married and settled in life decently. He freed himself from his domestic duties and also his commitments in his professional work. He then gave up his practice. He also retired from political and social work. Finally, after completing the work connected with the Lakshmi Narayana temple, he left home in 1925 to search for a Sadguru, who alone could make him understand the mystery of life.

### **SEARCH FOR A SADGURU**

In 1925, Sri B. V. Narasimha met Jagatguru H. H. Narasimha Bharati and sought his advice. The Acharya directed him to enter vanaprastha (dweller in the woods, which means post house holder's life) and begin his quest for a Sadguru in Ramanasraman at Tiruvannamalai. Ramana Maharishi had composed hymns on the Lord of Arunachala (Lord Shiva). B.V.N. Swamiji stayed in Tiruvannamalai for 3 years. After getting Sri Ramana Maharishi's blessings and permission, Narasimha Swamiji went to Pandharpur to worship Lord Vitthal. He wrote the biography of Ramana Maharishi, the sage of Arunachala, with the title 'Self Realisation'. Till then, Ramana Maharishi's value was appreciated and profiled by a limited circle. Swamiji's

quick and intellectual perception, his deep debt of gratitude to Maharishi resulted in the publication of 'Self Realisation', through which he made Ramana Maharishi known everywhere to a larger number of people with religious pursuits. Ramana Maharishi attained Mahasamadhi on 14th April, 1950.

In Pandharpur, Narasimha Swamiji cultivated devotion; but his aim was to find out a Sadguru. He made enquiries and came to know, that in Khedgaon (a place 34 miles from Poona) Sadguru Narayan Maharaj was living. B.V.N. Swamiji approached him in his Ashram for guidance. Narasimha Swamiji asked the Maharaj, where he could find the Kohinoor, the richest gem. The Maharaj directed him to go west wards. Narasimha Swamiji went to Meherbad, a place near Ahmednagar and stayed with Meher Baba for sometime. Meher Baba was considered to be a perfect master, who had toured round the world. He was previously known as Meherwan, born in 1894 in a Zorastrain family in Poona. Sri Meher Baba was a pupil of Sri Upasani Baba of Sakori. Following the advice of Meher Baba's disciples, Narasimha Swamiji proceeded to meet Sri Upasani Baba.

Narasimha Swamiji was in pursuit of the Bhakli-marg. Sri Upasani Baba advised him to stick to the Bhakli-marg and not fritter away his powers in metaphysical speculation. He also advised him to develop his knowledge through jap, bhajan and parayan etc. and lead the life of a holy ascetic. Upasani Baba's teachings and methods were against Narasimha Swamiji's opinions and expectations about correct religious life. So, he left Sri Upasani Baba in 1933 resolving never to go back.

Sri Narasimha Swamiji began his pilgrimage with a visit to the Siddharudha Mutt in Hubli. Here, he met a Sadaka. That Sadaka was eager to go to some place and settle down to a religious life. Narasimha Swamiji promised to help him. This commitment made Swamiji to take him on a pilgrim from Hubli to Pandharpur, Khedgaon. The Hubli Sadaka thought that the only safe place for him was Sakori. Being informed, that Sri Upasani Baba was not in Sakori, Sri Narasimha Swamiji agreed to take the Sadaka to Sakori intending to proceed to Dwarka immediately avoiding a meeting with Upasani Baba.

Reaching Sakori to his great astonishment he came to know, that Sri Upasani Baba was there. He paid his respects and bowed to him. The Sadaka told Swamiji that he was not allowed to stay in Upasani Baba's Ashram. He requested Swamiji to speak on his behalf. Upasani Baba agreed to allow that Sadaka to stay with him in Sakori, if Narasimha Swamiji was prepared to stay with him in doing the Sadhana, following his path without proceeding further on pilgrimage.

Narasimha Swamiji had heard from Upasani Baba about Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi (Shirdi is close to Sakori, six and a half kms. from Sakori). He wrote in his book 'The Sage of Sakori', how much Sai Baba had helped Sri Upasani Baba. Sri Narasimha Swamiji began to collect information about Sri Sai Baba. He discovered, that Sri Sai Baba was really Sri Ram or Sri Krishna, born for the welfare of mankind and he found in Sai, The Trinity. Upasani Baba's reputation was so great that Mahatma Gandhi had approached him in 1927 with a view to secure his blessings for national welfare. Swamiji reasoned, if Sri Upasani Baba, the disciple, was so great, his Master, Sri Sai Baba must be much greater, still it did not occur to him to pay a visit

to Sri Sai Baba's Mahasamadhi till the destined hour arrived. With the permission and blessings of Sri Upasani Baba, Narasimha Swamiji set out for Shirdi.

### **BECOMES A SAI DEVOTEE**

In 1936, Narasimha Swamiji visited the Samadhi of Sri Sai Baba. It was a memorable event in his life. He stood silently watching the Samadhi. It was the happiest moment in his life. Baba spoke to him in eloquent silence. Sai Baba kindled the light in Swamiji. It was an everlasting, spiritual bliss to him. He expressed his joy as follows :

"My hunger for spiritual food was not satisfied, till I came to Shirdi. At Shirdi, I was given more than I could take. I had at last discovered my Sadguru. He is Samartha Sadguru and I live in constant communion with him."

Swamiji was surprised to find, how, for nearly sixty years, a great saint had lived and blessed so many in that neglected village. Swamiji wanted all to experience this spiritual bliss, which Sai Baba can bestow on us. In nineteen thirties, the number of persons seeking solace at the feet of Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi was very small. He also wanted to carry Baba's message to his home province touring every town and village and spread Baba's gospel everywhere in India. He knew enough Marathi to seek and collect information from those, who were lucky enough to come into personal contact with his Master, Sai Maharaj.

In this way, he met and interviewed more than sixty devotees, who had personally seen Sri Baba. Among them were Abdul, Dasganu Maharaj, Sri M.B. Rege etc. Swamiji made enquiries and recorded their experiences, which revealed, how Baba had helped His devotees from danger. Then, with justice Rege, he toured Maharashtra, addressing mass meetings in English and Marathi in many places. Meanwhile, he wrote a series of articles on Sai Baba in the 'Sunday Times' of Madras. All these activities occupied him till the end of 1938 and in the beginning of 1939, he returned to Madras.

### **FOUNDATION OF ALL INDIA SAI SAMAJ**

Swamiji found, that Shirdi Sanslhan of Sri Sai Baba had a mandali (association), in which any Sai devotee could become a member. But, the mandali had no branch anywhere. Swamiji, therefore, felt the need for forming an All India Sai Samaj with the object of disseminating and spreading Sai Bhakti and Sai mission in Madras. Soon after he returned to Madras in 1939, he took active steps to start the All India Sai Samaj, having its office at Mylapore, Madras. With Baba's grace, Narasimha Swamiji founded the All India Sai Samaj in 1940. Later, many upasana japs were founded, spreading all over the country.

### **SRI NARASIMHA SWAMIJI'S SAI-PRACHAR**

Sri B.V. Narasimha Swamiji felt, how important it was to spread the spiritual life and message of Baba throughout our country. So, he looked for the biography on Baba. He got Dasganu Maharaja's 'Sai Leelamrit' in Marathi, 'Glimpses of Spirituality' by Raobahadur M.W. Pradhan and also 'Sai Satcharita' in verse in Marathi, written by Annasaheb Dabholkar.

His first publication 'Who is Sai Baba' was released in 1939. His next work 'Wondrous Saint' has been translated into Telugu, Hindi, Bengali and Gujrathi. 'Charters and Sayings by Narasimha Swamiji' came out next with a foreword by Baba's ankita child justice M. B. Rege. The author's next work was 'Gospel of Sri Sai Baba', which had been translated into Tamil, Telugu, Hindi and Malyalam. Swamiji composed hymns in Sanskrit, entitled 'Sri Sainath Smaranam', which was translated into Tamil and .English. In 1944, Swamiji wrote a play in seven acts in Tamil, entitled 'Sri Sai Charita Natakam'. Swamiji also wrote 'Sri Sai Harikalha' to popularise Sai-movement through kalakshepam (musical discourse).

Sri Narasimha Swamiji commenced his great task of writing a detailed biography of Sri Sai Baba in English. The first two volumes were published in March, 1943 and July, 1956 respectively. Although the manuscripts were ready for volume III and volume IV, these two came out as posthumous works in 1957 and 1969. 'Glimpses of Sai Baba' by Narasimha Swamiji was published in 1945. In addition to these, he published many other books on Sai Baba, many of which have been translated into many Indian languages, like Tamil, Telugu, Marathi etc.

It became necessary to formulate a systematic way of conducting Sai worship. So, Swamiji wrote 'Sri Sainath Pooja Vidhi' and 'Sai Sahasranamam' in addition to the ashtotaram, already in use and practice. This is published in Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and Canareese.

CONVENTIONS : Swamiji thought of holding an All India Sai Devotees' convention. It became necessary for a conference to be held, in which the devotees from all Sai Samajas can participate. This conference held annually or once in two or three years, would discuss problems and measures to strengthen and expand Sai-movcmcnt. The president of the All India Sai Samaj was elected the president of the reception committee. The First All India Sai Devotees' convention was organised for four days from 16lh May to 19th May, 1946 at P. S. High School, Mylapore, Madras. Two hundred delegates and a large number of local devotees attended the convention. Proceedings opened daily with archana and pooja to" Sri Sainath Maharaj. Sri Martand, son of late Sri Mhalsapali attended the convention. Poojya Sri Narasimha Swamiji, founded president, All India Sai Samaj and many others, like Sri Kesavaiahji of Shenoy Nagar, Madras and Martand spoke on various aspects of Baba, His teachings etc., in Tamil, Telugu and Hindi. Delegates discussed activities and problems of their upasamajas and samajas. Delegates and many participants of the convention narrated their experiences as Sai devotees. The cultural programme of the convention included devotional music, Sai Harikatha in Tamil and Telugu drama, depicting the life of Baba.

The first All India Sai Devotees' convention set the pattern for other conventions, held in later years. Eight conventions were held in Swamiji's life time in the following places : I. Madras (1946), II. Coimbatore (1947), III. Madurai (1949), IV. Calcutta (1950), V. Dharwar (1951), VI. Poona (1952), VII. Bombay (1953) and VIII. Baroda (1954).

Narasimha Swamiji's age and declining health prevented him from attending subsequent conventions held far away from Madras. Close associates of Swamiji in

Sai-service, such as Sri Saipadananda Radhakrishna Swamiji, (President of Sai Spiritual Centre, Bangalore) and Sri Kesavaiahji (Later on the founder President of Sri Sai Baba Bhakta Samajam, Shenoy Nagar, Madras) were deputed to preside over the conventions. Publishing convention souvenirs of large size came into practice.

SAI SUDHA: In 1940, Sri Narasimha Swamiji started the 'Sai Sudha' monthly with English, Tamil, Sanskrit and Telugu sections. Swamiji published 'Devotees Experiences' in three parts in English and Tamil and also his tour programmes in advance.

After his lecture tours, local devotees and organisers sent reports of his work for publication. In the midst of his lecture tours and other work connected with Sai literature, Swamiji attended to his daily duties. He promptly replied all the letters addressed to him and did all correspondence himself. He granted interviews, presided over committee meetings, and annual general body meetings and directed the daily activities at head quarters.

Swamiji inaugurated the three annual festivals, namely, Sri Ramanavami, Gurupoornima and Baba's Mahasamadhi day on the pattern of Shirdi. Laksharchana, Bhajans, devotional music, spiritual discourses and poor-feeding formed the main programmes of these festivals. At All India Sai Samaj Sri Ramanavami and Mahasamadhi day were celebrated for ten days organising devotional music programmes and religious discourses. Calendars containing Baba's pictures, lockets and slides were made and sold at nominal price. Free distribution of post card size Baba's photo was also done by Swamiji along with Baba's Udi-prasad. On 15th May, 1954, Sai Free Dispensary was opened by Swamiji' at the All India Sai Samaj for the benefit of the slum dwellers, library and Sai Vidyalaya were opened after Swamiji's period to fulfil his long cherished desire.

Papaiya Chetty of Bangalore, one of the readers of Swamiji's books on Shri Sai Baba, met Swamiji at Shri Sai Baba's temple at Shirdi in 1940. He handed over a bundle, containing Rs. 11,458 to Swamiji for his work and left without saying anything. He asked the trustees of Shirdi Sanshan to utilise the amount for Sai-prachar. As they declined to accept it, Swamiji got Baba's will through a child (who picked one slip out of the three, written by Swamiji). According to it, he utilised that money for Sai-pracharak work.

In 1949, the Samaj was shifted from Broodies Road to the plot of land (10 grounds), bought in Alarmelu Mangapuram, Mylapore. By donations from generous devotees, through the appeal in Sai Sudha and sale of Sai literature, funds were raised to complete the front hall. Here Baba's picture was installed and Swamiji started the worship on Gurupoornima day on 7th July, 1952. By 1953, construction of the Mandir with a tower, on the model of Shirdi, was completed.

The Mahakumbhabhishckam of the Mandir was fixed on the 18th October, 1953. Earlier to the Mahakumbhabhishckam Swamiji slipped in the bathroom. This brought on a serious breakage of the thigh bone and sixty days confinement in the hospital, followed by a subsequent serious attack of dysentery. No energy was left to him to move about. This continued nearly upto the middle of 1954. It was clear, that his

remaining energy and remaining life were intended to be devoted to Baba. Swamiji concentrated on completing his work 'Life of Sai Baba', recalling all within his memory. Baba provided his ankita child with a stenographer. Without the help of a stenographer, it would have been impossible to turn out any work by Swamiji either for the book or for the 'Sai Sudha' or for the numerous pamphlets. Baba designated a doctor in good position with excellent knowledge and made him repeatedly attend upon Swamiji.

The royal present of Rs. 5,000/ - (Rupees five thousand only) by His Highness, the Maharaja of Mysore enabled the Samaj to purchase a press, printing machines and blocks. It is the physical frame of Swamiji and spirit of Baba, that has blessed us with four volumes of the life of Sri Sai Baba. It is to be noted, that no copyright is reserved in any of the books or publications brought out by Swamiji.

On 12th September, 1956, Swamiji's 83rd birthday, was celebrated at the head quarters and- at upasamaja's as in the previous years. From 8th October, 1956, Swamiji could not move out of his bed on account of fever. He directed from his bed pracharak work, dictated editorial to the Sai Sudha, attended to other works and spent the rest of his time in meditating on Baba. Gradually his limbs benumbed. On 19th October, 1956, Swamiji left his mortal coil, leaving us the legacy of Sai-movement and All India Sai Samaj, Madras. Baba's grace and H. H. Narasimha Swamiji's dynamism drew numerous devotees. One of the greatest devotees of Sai Baba, Sri Dasganu Maharaj once said, "A jeweller, like Sri Narasimha Swamiji knows the value of a gem and will not rest till he brings the brilliance of the crystal to the peoples' notice."

Swamiji's picture was unveiled on 26th January, 1966 by Justice M. B. Rege in the Samadhi Mandir at Shirdi and was presented to Shirdi Sansthan and this portrait is kept along with those of other devotees.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I was able to write this brief biography of Gurudev Sri H.H. Narasimha Swamiji by doing a thorough study of the available literature in English and Tamil about Baba and Narasimha Swamiji. The references done by me are from the publications of All India Sai Samaj. I am highly thankful to All India Sai Samaj, Mylapore, Madras for their valuable publications and also to the authors of the following books for the spiritual guidance given to me through their books

1. Sri Narasimha Swamiji, Apostle of Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi by Swami Sai Padananda.
2. Search, Discovery and Mission, Life sketch of H.H. Narasimha Swamiji by P.S. Varadaraj Iyer.
3. Life of Sai Baba, Volume I to IV by Sri H.H. Narasimha Swamiji.
4. Sai Sudha and convention souvenirs are my other sources.

I owe my humble pranams and indebtedness to Sri Sai Padananda Radhakrishna Swamiji, former President, All India Sai Samaj, who was responsible for the construction of Sri H.H. Narasimha Swamiji's cottage in the All India Sai Samaj

premises, as a tribute and homage to Swamiji during his birth centenary year. I pray Sri Sai Baba, the Benevolent Master and Sri Narasimha Swamiji to shower on all of us their choicest blessings.

Bow to Sri Sai Peace be to all

- Sai Man! R. Jayamani

Madras, Tamil Nadu.