

THE 51ST DAI AL-MUTLAQ
SYEDNA TAHER SAIFUDDIN^{RA}
URUS- 19TH RAJAB-UL-ASABB, 1385 H/1965 AD, MUMBAI

In his qasida-autobiography Syedna Taher Saifuddin RA introduces himself in the 35th verse:

I am the 51st Dai.

The special attributes of every previous

Da'I are contained within me

إني أنا حاد وخمسون انطوت ٣٥

فيه خصائص كل داع عابر

This is a brief biographical article of the 51st Dai al-Mutlaq Syedna Taher Saifuddin^{RA} highlighting his accomplishments in his unprecedented 50 years as Dai. The virtues of all previous Du'at were encompassed in Syedna Taher Saifuddin. His era was defined by a transformation from an earlier prevalence of doubt and tumult to full certainty in belief and devotion, by a renaissance of the knowledge of Aal-e-Muhammad and by acknowledgment of the Dawoodi Bohra Community worldwide as an educated, peaceful and enterprising community.

In a telling anecdote, the representatives of the community in Ahmedabad once paid a visit to the Governor to inform him of Syedna Taher Saifuddin's upcoming visit and requesting his cooperation in organizing a State welcome befitting Syedna. The Governor, Mehdi Nawaz Jung, curtly told the representatives, 'Who is Syedna?'. The representatives were stunned. The Governor continued, 'Do *you* know who Syedna is? How many Dawoodi Bohras are in this world? And yet it is Syedna who has placed you as a community on the world map!'

Syedna Taher Saifuddin was born in Surat on 27th Zil-Qa'da – the month of the descent of the Ka'ba -- in 1305H in the era of the 48th Dai Syedna Abdul-Husain Husamuddin RA, corresponding to the English date 4th August 1888AD. His father, the 49th Dai Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin took him to the *hazrat* of the 48th Dai. The latter gifted him a sword, heralding his stalwart defense of the Dawat and his *laqab* Saifuddin, the sword of Islam.

His father Syedna Burhanuddin RA entrusted his education, ilm and tarbiyyat, for 13 years to the great erudite scholar Syedi Abdeali Mohyuddin RA, son of the 48th Dai. After Syedi Abdeali Mohyuddin's demise, Syedna Abdullah Badruddin continued Syedna Taher's sabaq education for the next ten 10 years. Through these shining mentors, the knowledge of the great Dai Syedna Abdeali Saifuddin RA reached Syedna Taher Saifuddin RA.

Syedna Taher Saifuddin was very active in the khidmat and service of his father the 49th Dai. He accompanied and served him when he travelled for Hajj, an arduous journey at the time. He continued to serve his successor the 50th Dai with devotion and was one of his trusted confidants.

The 50th Dai appointed him as his successor shortly before his demise on the 10th of Rabi-ul-Awwal 1333H. Syedna Taher Saifuddin describes this event in his qasida-autobiography:

Syedna Badruddin said when he conferred Nass on me:

"The Garden of this righteous Da'waht is like a green garden..."

قد قال لما نص روضة دعوة الـ

—حق النضيرة مثل روض ناضر

... but it is overcast by devastating clouds of hateful maleficence, besieged with intense darkness.

حفت بسحب من فساد ذوي العنا-

-د المفسدين تراكمت بـدياجر

Establish firm, O Saifuddin, the Da'wat of the progeny of Fatimah, chiefs of noble origins.

فأقم أسيف الدين دعوة آل فا-

-طمة بهاليل كرام عناصر

Do not pay heed, ever, to the enemies of right guidance, haters and hypocrites all

لا تكثرث أبدا بأعداء الهدى

من مبغض ومنافق ومجاهر

For Allah, the All-Powerful, is your master, the Master of the Time (Imam uz zaman), the best of helpers, is your helper.

فالله مولاك العزيز وصاحب الـ

—عصر النصير وذاك أكرم ناصر

I pray that the Imam of our time grants you the honour of his zuhur, revealing himself from long seclusion.

أرجو إمام زماننا يعطيك من

شرف الظهور أجل فخر الفاخر

Stand firm protecting and struggling for the Da'wat of the Master, the present

قم حاميا ومكافحا عن دعوة الـ

Fatimid Imam.

مولی الإمام الفاطمي الحاضر

[This is what he said to me. So then ...]
I, Taher Saifuddin, upheld the Da'wat, seeking
aid from Allah and from His waliyy, Imam uz
zaman, the wise, skilled guide.

فأقمته مستنصرا بالله ثم—
—وليّه الهادي الحكيم الماهر

At that time, the people of the Dawat—
prompted by the rebellions of the enemies and
their mischief—
were in a darkly disturbed state

والناس من فتن العدى وفسادهم
في مدلهم هزاز وفواقر

As for me, my belief is unwavering and absolute,
Aid and victory will come to me from Allah, the
All-Powerful.

أما أنا فعلى يقين كامل
بالنصر من عند الإله القادر

The atmosphere in the Dawat when Syedna Taher Saifuddin RA became Dai was one of *fitnat*, doubt and fraction. The enemies of Dawat had spread doubt in the community about the veracity of the Nass on the 47th Dai, Syedna Abdul-Qadir Najmuddin RA. At the young age of twenty-eight years, Syedna Taher Saifuddin ascended to the throne of Dawat. He established the veracity of the Nass and the authority of the Dai in the landmark Chanda bhai Gulla Case and another case in the Privy Council later on.

He says about this:

I confronted their false claims, they returned
defeated and fatigued, I returned victorious.

بارزتهم فيها فعادوا خاسري—
من وحاسرين وعدت عود الظافر

Their goal was to extinguish God's light,
But God destroyed them.

إطفاء نور الله كان مرادهم
أرداهم قهر الإله القاهر

God is our Creator, He is the Custodian of His
light

والله خالقنا متم نوره

So let the hypocrites and disavowers do their worst!

مع كره كل منافق ومناكر

Syedna Taher Saifuddin also addressed this atmosphere of doubt directly in his Waaz-sermons, Risalats (epistles) and on a one-to-one basis with many individual followers. Gradually, the atmosphere of doubt and tumult was transformed through his efforts into one of certainty in belief and heartfelt devotion.

Syedna Taher Saifuddin focused on education. He established madrasas and secular schools all across cities and towns where mumineen resided. During his tenure more than 300 schools were built. At a time when the literacy rate in India was very low, the Dawoodi Bohra community achieved a 100% literacy rate.

Syedna Taher Saifuddin also personally taught *sabaqs* (religious courses). During one intense period, he personally taught 28 sabaqs every single day.

He revamped the organization of the Dawat seminary, and established the Jami'a Saifiyyah in Surat. The Jamia Saifiyyah thrived and gained a reputation amongst Islamic Universities. Syedna Taher Saifuddin also personally conducted the Jami'ah annual oral examinations.

Syedna Taher Saifuddin also personally trained his eldest son and successor the 52nd Dai Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin RA and also his successor's successor, his 11th son, the 53rd Dai Syedna Khuzaima Qutbuddin TUS.

Since his earliest days as Dai, Syedna Taher Saifuddin composed a vast library of treatises on Fatimid knowledge the *Rasa'il Ramadaniyya* (singular *Risalat*). The 40 Risalats display a mastery of Arabic and are a priceless resource for scholars and students. He also composed over 10,000 verses of poetry in classical Arabic and also several odes in Urdu and Dawat-ni-zaban, in supplication, munajaat, to Allah Taala and in praise of Allah's Awliya.

Over the years, Syedna Taher Saifuddin traveled extensively for pilgrimages for Hajj, and Karbala and Najaf ziyarats. Syedna Taher Saifuddin was also the first Dai to visit Fatimid Cairo.

Syedna Taher Saifuddin also traveled far and wide to cities, towns and even villages where his followers resided. His very first safar as Dai was to the Kathiawar region. His travels also included historic visits to the Far-East and East Africa, where large numbers of his followers had emigrated and settled. He traveled far more than his predecessors because of the ease of travel brought forth by the expansion of the train network and the emergence of air travel. During many of these travels, Syedna Taher Saifuddin faced hardships and discomforts, and he undertook them uncomplainingly, willingly, only for the sake of mumineen, to give hidayat and barakat to mumineen. Syedna Taher Saifuddin once told his son Syedna Qutbuddin that he had even travelled by bullock cart to visit his followers.

Over his fifty-three year tenure as Dai, Syedna Taher Saifuddin also undertook several major construction and religious projects. He dedicated the inner curtains of the Ka'ba during his Hajj pilgrimage, and these curtains, the offerings of the hijab of the Haqiqi Ka'ba, hung in the Ka'ba for sixty long years. He also built and dedicated the Zarih of Maulana Ali SA in Najaf and before that the Zarih of Imam Husain SA in Karbala. Later, he also built the Zarih of Rasul-Husain SA in Cairo. Overcoming tremendous challenges, his beloved son Syeda Qutbuddin transferred this Zarih from Iraq to Egypt in the last few months of Syedna Taher Saifuddin's life. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin inaugurated the Zarih. Syedna Taher Saifuddin also built the majestic 'Mahall-us-Saify' in Mecca, only a few hundred meters from the Haram of Baitullah, in aspiration for the Imam's Zuhoor. He built the splendid Ghurrat ul Masajid – famously known as Saif Masjid – in Mumbai, from his personal wealth. He also built numerous masjids, schools and hospitals, and completed many other religious and social welfare projects.

Syedna Taher Saifuddin was the preeminent chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University, unanimously elected by the University's board for three consecutive terms, from 1950 until his demise in 1965. In the inaugural convocation, the Vice-Chancellor of the University introduced Syedna Taher Saifuddin in a remarkable way: He first stated that until now all those who had occupied the position of its Chancellor had their own seals (*sikka* – coins minted with their name; that is, they were heads of state). He then curtly said, 'But the present Chancellor, Syedna Sahib, has no seal'. Finally, in a vigorous tone, he declaimed, 'Indeed, Syedna sahib's seal is on our very hearts' (*inka sikka hamaare dil pe he*).

Aligarh Muslim University benefited greatly from Syedna's Chancellorship, as many heads of state and high-level dignitaries, many of whom were close to Syedna, visited the University, such as the King of Saudi Arabia, Shah of Iran, King of Ethiopia, Shah of Afghanistan and President Nasser of Egypt.

Whenever he visited Aligarh Muslim University, Syedna Taher Saifuddin insisted that his itinerary include an audience in which students could meet and interact with him. When Syedna departed from Aligarh after one such memorable visit, students thronged the railway station, weeping, and they said to someone in Syedna's entourage, we are bidding farewell not to our Chancellor, but to our loving father, *pidar-e-shafeeq*. All the more so for the children of his Dawat. Syedna Taher Saifuddin spent his whole life caring for their wellbeing, guiding them individually and as a community, talking with mumineen late into the night, advising them about their personal problems, and bestowing upon them precious pearls of advice and doa.

Syedna Taher Saifuddin's daily routine was the most rigorous one could imagine. Like Syedna Ismail Badruddin Bawa, and like all his *azeem ush shaan* predecessors, he spent the lion's share of his hours in *ibadat* and *ilm*. Every morning, he led *fajr* namaaz in Badri Mahal Masjid. Then he spend the next several hours in *sabaq*, teaching young and old in his family, in small and large

groups. Then he attended *bethak*, giving audience to hundreds of mumineen daily. Then he prayed *zuhr asar* namaaz in his private apartments (always with *sunnat* and *nafilet*, as also in the case of *maghrib* and *isha*; and on Friday's he led *zuhr asar* namaaz with *imamat* and *vasila* in Saifee Masjid). Then, after lunch, and a short rest, he drove to Badri Mahal, where he attended to Dawat matters, and again conducted *bethak* for mumineen. In the evening, he led *maghrib isha* prayers in Badri Mahal Masjid. Then he returned to Saifee Mahal, and after completing his personal nightly *wazifa* of *tasbeeh* and *tawassul* namaaz, he gave precious minutes of his time to the children of his family, who came for *shifa*, and who did *araz* to Syedna about their matters large and small. Then, he ate dinner in the Saifee Mahal hall with sahebo and qasre aali members. Some nights, he gave sharaf of ziyafat to mumineen mukhlesees. After dinner, Syedna again conducted *bethak*, giving his most precious, individual, private time to mumineen in his apartments.

Syedna Taher Saifuddin's *shaan* of Waaz and Bayaan is legendary. An erudite orator and a great scholar, he bestowed pearls of wisdom and *imaan* in his sermons to mumineen throughout the years, in Mumbai, Surat, and in mumineen's hometowns. His recitation of *wasila* in Shehre Ramadaan and Laylatul Qadar, and his narration of the *Maqatal* of Syed ush shuhada, deeply touched the hearts of all present, and continue to give *barakat* (in their audio recordings, written texts, and in their eternal *ruhaniyyat*).

Syedna Taher Saifuddin passed to the zumra of the Imam in Matheran on 19th Rajab 1385H (Nov. 1965). Syedna Burhanuddin RA built the magnificent Qubba of Syedna Taher Saifuddin 'Rozat Tahera'. The inner walls of the Qubba are engraved with the entire Qur'an Majeed and encrusted with gold leaf. Now, his successor Syedna Burhanuddin RA lies next to him in the Mubarak Roza. May Allah Ta'ala grant us the sharaf of ziarat of the 51st and 52nd Dai.

Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin RA did *araz* of *iltija* to him in his *marthiya*:

You did *shafa'at* for us always when you were
with us we beseech your *shafa'at* now, too,
when you have gone to the abode of the Imam

كَدَابِكَ فِي الدُّنْيَا شَفِيعَ الْعِبَادِ كُنْ
شَفِيعًا لِعَبْدٍ زَائِرٍ لَكَ مَشْهَدًا

Syedna Khuzaima Qutbuddin TUS did *araz* of *iltija* to him in his *marthiya*:

سَيْفُ	الْهُدَى	جَوَابَ	دَو
دَل	نِي	أَمِيد	دَو
دِيدَارِ	نَو	خَوَابِ	دَو
سَيِّدِنَا	طَاهِر	سَيْف	الدِّينِ

اَعْلَى اللّٰهُ قُدْسَهُ وَرَزَقْنَا شَفَاعَتَهُ وَانْسَهُ * بِحَقِّ سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ الطَّاهِرِينَ * صَلَوَاتُ اللّٰهِ عَلَيْهِمْ اَجْمَعِينَ *