

Sai Satcharitra

Sai Satcharitra - Chapter XXXVII

In this chapter Hemadpant after making some preliminary observations on some points of Vedanta, describes the Chavadi procession.

Preliminary

Blessed is Sai's life, blessed is His daily routine. His ways and actions are indescribable. Sometimes He was intoxicated with Brahmanand (divine joy), and at other times content with Self knowledge. Doing so many things sometimes, He was unconcerned with them. Though He seemed at times quite actionless (doing nothing) He was not idle or dozing; He always abided in His own Self. Though He looked calm and quiet as the placid sea, He was deep and unfathomable. Who can describe His ineffable nature? He regarded men as brothers, women as sisters and mothers. He was a perfect and perpetual celibate as everybody knows. May the understanding (knowledge), we got in His company, last long unto death. Let us ever serve Him with whole-hearted devotion to His feet. Let us see Him (God) in all beings and let us ever love His name.

Hemadpant, after making some lengthy dissertations on some topics of Vedanta, which he himself considers as a digression, goes on to describe the Chavadi procession.

Chavadi Procession

Baba's dormitory has been already described. One day He slept in the Masjid and on the next, in the Chavadi (a small building containing a room or two near the Masjid). This alternate sleeping in both these buildings went on till Baba's Mahasamadhi. From 10th December 1909 devotees began to offer regular worship to Baba in the Chavadi. This we will now describe with His grace. When the turn of retiring to the Chavadi came, people flocked to the Masjid and made bhajan in the mandap (courtyard) for a few hours. Behind them was a beautiful Ratha (small car), to the right a Tulsi-vrindavan and in front Baba, and between these the devotees fond of bhajan. Men and women who had a liking for the bhajan came in time. Some took Tal, Chiplis and Kartal, Mridang, Khanjiri and Ghol (all musical instruments) in their hands and conducted the bhajan.

Sai Baba was the Magnet Who drew all the devotees to Him there. Outside in the open, some trimmed their divatyas, (torches), some decorated the palanquin, some stood with cane-sticks in their hands and uttered cries of victory to Baba. The corner was decorated with buntings. Round about the Masjid, rows of burning lamps shed their light. Baba's horse 'Shyamakarna' stood fully decorated outside. Then Tatya Patil came with a party of men to Baba and asked Him to be ready. Baba sat quiet in his place till Tatya came and helped Him to get up by putting his arm under Baba's arm-pit. Tatya called Baba by the name of Mama. Really their relationship was extremely intimate. Baba wore on his body the usual kafni, took His satka (short stick) under His arm-pit and after taking His chilim (tobacco-pipe) and tobacco and placing a cloth over His shoulder became ready to start. Then Tatya threw a golden-embroidered beautiful Shela (Shawl) over His body. After this Baba, moving a little the bundle of fuel-sticks lying behind with His right toe and then extinguishing the burning lamp with His right hand, started for the Chavadi. Then all sorts of musical instruments, tashe, band and horns and mridang, gave out their different sounds; and fire-works exhibited their different and various coloured views. Men and women singing Baba's name started walking, making bhajan to the accompaniment of mridang and veena. Some danced with joy and some carried various flags and standards. The Bhaldars announced Baba's name when He came on the steps of the Masjid. On the two sides of Baba stood persons, who held chavaris and others who fanned Baba. On the way were spread folds of cloth on which Baba walked on, being supported by devotees' hands. Tatyaba held the left hand and Mhalasapati the right and Bapusaheb Jog held the chhatra (umbrella) over His head. In this fashion Baba marched on to the Chavadi. The fully decorated red horse, named Shyamakarna led the way and behind him were all the carriers, waiters, musical players and the crowd of devotees. Hari-nama (the name of the Lord) chanted to the accompaniment of music rent the skies as also the name of Sai. In this manner the procession reached the corner when all the persons that joined this party seemed well-pleased and delighted.

On coming to this corner Baba stood facing the Chavadi and shone with a peculiar lustre. It seemed, as if the face of Baba glittered like dawn, or like the glory of the rising sun. Baba stood there with a concentrated mind, facing the north, as if He was calling somebody. All the instruments played their music while Baba moved His right arm up and down for some time.

Kakasaheb Dixit at this time came forward with a silver plate containing flowers besmeared with gulal (red powder) and threw them on Baba's body off and on. The musical instruments played their best at this juncture and Baba's face beamed with steady and added radiance and beauty, and all the persons drank this lustre to their hearts' content. Words fail to describe the scene and splendour of this occasion. Some times Mhalasapati began to dance being possessed or obsessed by some deity, but all were surprised to see that Baba's concentration was not in the least disturbed. With a lantern in his hand Tatya Patil walked on Baba's left side and Bhagat Mhalasapati on the right, holding with his hand the hem of Baba's garment. What a beautiful procession and what an expression of devotion! To witness this, men and women, poor and rich, flocked together there. Baba walked very slow. Bhaktas followed on both sides with love and devotion. With joy pervading the whole atmosphere of the place, the procession reached the Chavadi. That scene and those days are gone now. Nobody can see them now or in the future; still remembering and visualising that scene and sight, we can bring solace and comfort to our minds.

The Chavadi was also fully decorated with a good white ceiling, mirrors and many sorts of lamps. On reaching it Tatya went ahead and spread an asan and placing a bolster made Baba sit there and made Him wear good angaraksha (coat). Then the devotees worshipped Him in various ways. They put on His head a mugut (crown) with a tuft above, placed garlands of flowers and jewels round His neck and marking His forehead with musk-mixed vertical lines and a dot (as Vaishnava devotees do) they started at Him for long to their hearts' content. They changed His head-dress now and then and held it aloft on the head, fearing that Baba might throw it away. Baba knew the heart of them all and meekly submitted to all their methods without objection. With these decorations He looked wonderfully beautiful.

Nanasaheb Nimonkar held the Chhatra (umbrella) with its beautiful pendants which moved in a circle with its supporting stick. Bapusaheb Jog washed the feet of Baba in a silver dish and offered 'arghya' and worship with due formalities, then besmeared His arms with sandal paste, and offered tambul (betel-leaves). Baba sat on the asan (gadi), while Tatya and others kept standing and falling at His feet. When Baba sat on the gadi supporting Himself against the bolster, devotees on both sides waved chamars and fans. Shama then prepared the chillim and handed it over to Tatyaba who drew a flame out of it by his breath and then gave it to Baba.

After Baba had His smoke, it was given to Bhagat Mhalasapati and then it was passed round to all. Blessed was the inanimate chillim. It had first to undergo many ordeals of penance, such as being treated by pot-makers, dried in the open sun and burnt in fire and then it had the good fortune to get the contact of Baba's hand and His kiss. After this function was over, devotees put garlands of flowers on His neck and gave Him nose-gays and bunches of flowers for smelling. Baba who was dispassion or non-attachment incarnate, cared a fig for all these necklaces of jewels, and garlands of flowers and other decorations; but out of real love to His devotees, He allowed them to have their own way and to please themselves. Finally Bapusaheb Jog waved the arati over Baba, observing all formalities, the musical instruments playing thier auspicious tunes. When this arati was over, the devotees returned home one by one saluting Baba and taking His leave. When Tatyapa Patil, after offering chillim, attar (scent) and rose-water, rose to depart, Baba said to him lovingly - "Guard Me, go if you like, but return sometimes at night and enquire after Me." Replying in the affirmative Tatyapa left the Chhavadi and went home. Then Baba Himself prepared His bed. He arranged 50 or 60 white chadders one upon another and thus making His bed, went to rest.

We shall also now take rest and close this chapter with a request to the readers that they should remember Sai Baba and His Chhavadi procession daily before they retire and go to bed.

Bow to Shri Sai - Peace be to all