

Shri Sai Satcharitra

Chapter XLIII & XLIV (43 and 44)

Baba's Passing Away (Continued)

Preparation - Samadhi-Mandir - Breaking of the Brick - 72 Hours' Samadhi - Jog's Sannyas - Baba's Nectar-like Words.

Chapters 43 and 44 continue the story of Baba's Passing away, and therefore they are taken together.

Previous Preparation

It is the general practice amongst the Hindus that when a man is about to die, some good religious scripture is read out to him with the object that his mind should be withdrawn from worldly things and fixed in matters spiritual, so that his future progress should be natural and easy. Everybody knows that when king Parikshiti was cursed by the son of a Brahmin Rishi and was about to die after a week, the great sage Shuka expounded to him the famous Bahagwat Puran in that week. This practice is followed even now and Gita, Bhagawat and other sacred books are read out to dying persons. Baba being an incarnation of God needed no such help, but just to set an example to the people, He followed this practice. When He knew that He was to pass away soon, He ordered one Mr.Vaze to read Ramavijaya to Him. Mr.Vaze read the book once in the week. Then Baba asked him to read the same again day and night and he finished the second reading in three days. Thus eleven days passed. Then again he read for three days and was exhausted. So Baba let him go and kept Himself quiet. He abided on His Self and was waiting for the last moment.

Two or three days previous, Baba had stopped His morning peregrinations and begging rounds and sat in the Masjid. He was conscious to the last and was advising the devotees not to lose heart. He let nobody know the exact time of His departure. Kakasaheb Dixit and Shriman Booty were dining daily with Him in the Masjid. That day (15th October) after arati, He asked them to go to their residence for dining. Still a few, viz., Laxmibai Shinde, Bhagoji Shinde, Bayaji, Laxman Bala Shimpi and Nanasaheb Nimonkar remained there. Shama was sitting down on the steps. After giving Rs. 9/- to Laxmibai Shinde, Baba said that He did not feel well there (in the Masjid) and that He should be

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taken to the Dagadi (stone) Wada of Booty, where He would be alright. Saying these last words, He leaned on Bayaji's body and breathed His last. Bhagoji noticed that His breathing had stopped and he immediately told this to Nanasaheb Nimonkar who was sitting below. Nanasaheb brought some water and poured it in Baba's mouth. It came out. Then he cried out loudly 'Oh Deva.' Baba seemed just to open His eyes and say 'Ah' in a low tone. But it soon become evident that Baba had left His body for good.

The news of Baba's passing away spread like a wild fire in the village of Shirdi and all people, men, women and children ran to the Masjid and began to mourn this loss in various ways. Some cried out loudly, some wallowed on in the streets and some fell down senseless. Tears ran down from the eyes of all and every one was smitten with sorrow.

Then the question arose - How to dispose off Baba's body? Some (Mahomedans) said that the body should be interred in an open space and a tomb built over it. Even Khushalchand and Amir Shakkar shared this opinion. But Ramachandra Patil, the village officer said to the villagers with a firm and determined voice, "Your thought is not acceptable to us. Baba's body should be nowhere placed except in the Wada." Thus people were divided on this point and discussion regarding this point went on for 36 hours.

On Wednesday morning Baba appeared to Laxman Mama Joshi in his dream and drawing him by His hand said -"Get up soon; Bapusaheb thinks that I am dead and so he won't come; you do the worship and the Kakad (morning) arati." Laxman Mama was the village astrologer and was the maternal uncle of Shama. He was an orthodox Brahmin and daily first worshipped Baba in the morning and then all the village deities. He had full faith in Baba. After the vision he came with all the pooja materials and not minding the protests of the moulvis, did the Pooja and the Kakad arati with all due formalities and went away. Then at noon Bapusaheb Jog came with all others and went through the noon-arati ceremony as usual.

Paying due respect to Baba's words the people decided to place His body in the Wada and started digging the central portion there. In the evening of

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Tuesday the Sub-Inspector came from Rahata and others from other places turned up and they all agreed to the proposal. Next morning Amirbhai came from Bombay and the Mamlatdar from Kopergaon. The people seemed divided in their opinion. Some insisted on interring His body in the open field. The Mamlatdar therefore took a general plebiscite and found that the proposal to use the Wada secured double the number of votes. He, however, wanted to refer the matter to the Collector and Kakasaheb Dixit got himself ready to go to Ahmednagar. In the meanwhile, by Baba's inspiration there was a change in the opinion of the other people and all the people unanimously voted for the proposal. On Wednesday evening Baba's body was taken in procession and brought to the Wada and was interred there with due formalities in the garbha, i.e., the central portion reserved for Murlidhar. In fact Baba became the Murlidhar and the Wada became a temple and a holy shrine, where so many devotees went and are going now to find rest and peace. All the obsequies of Baba were duly performed by Balasaheb Bhate and Upasani, a great devotee of Baba.

Breaking of the Brick

Some days before Baba's departure, there occurred an ominous sign foreboding the event. There was, in the Masjid an old brick on which Baba rested His hand and sat. At night time He leaned against it and had His asan. This went on for many years. One day, during Baba's absence, a boy who was sweeping the floor, took it up in his hand, and unfortunately it slipped from thence fell down broken into two pieces. When Baba came to know about this, He bemoaned its loss, crying - "It is not the brick but My fate that has been broken into pieces. It was My life-long companion, with it I always meditated on the Self, it was as dear to Me as My life, it has left Me to-day." Some may raise here a question - "Why should Baba express this sorrow for such an inanimate thing as a brick?" To this Hemadpant replies that saints incarnate in this world with the express mission of saving the poor helpless people, and when they embody themselves and mix and act with the people, they act like them, i.e., outwardly laugh, play and cry like all other people, but inwardly they are wide awake to their duties and mission.

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72 Hours' Samadhi

Thirty two years before this, i.e., in 1886 A.D., Baba made an attempt to cross the border line. On a Margashirsha Pournima (Full moon) day, Baba suffered from a severe attack of asthma. To get rid of it Baba decided to take His prana high up and go into samadhi. He said to Bhagat Mhalasapti - "Protect My body for three days. If I return, it will be alright; if I do not, bury My body in that open land (pointing to it) and fix two flags there as a mark." Saying this, Baba fell down at about 10 P.M. His breathing stopped, as well as His pulse. It seemed as if His prana left the body. All the people including the villagers came there and wanted to hold an inquest and bury the body in the place pointed by Baba. But Mhalasapati prevented this. With Baba's body on his lap he sat full three days guarding it. After three days passed, Baba showed signs of life at 3 A.M. His breathing commenced, the abdomen began to move. His eyes opened and stretching His limbs, Baba returned to consciousness (life) again.

From this and other accounts, let the readers consider whether Sai Baba was the three and a half cubits' body that He occupied for some years and that He left thereafter or He was the Self inside. The body, composed of the five elements is perishable and transient, but the Self within is the thing - Absolute Reality which is immortal and intransient. The pure Being, Consciousness or Brahma, the Ruler and Controller of the senses and mind is the thing Sai. This pervades all things in the universe and there is no space without it. For fulfilling His mission He assumed the body and after it was fulfilled, He threw away the body (the finite aspect), and assumed His infinite aspect. Sai ever lives, as also the previous Incarnation of God Datta, Shri Narsimha Saraswati of Ganagapur. His Passing away is only an outward aspect, but really He pervades all animate and inanimate things and is their Inner Controller and Ruler. This can be, and is even now experienced by many who surrender themselves completely to Him and worship Him with whole-hearted devotion.

Though it is not possible for us to see Baba's form now, still if we go to Shirdi, we shall find His beautiful life-like portrait adorning the masjid. This has been drawn by Shamrao Jaykar, a famous artist and well-known devotee of

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Baba. To an imaginative and devout spectator this portrait can give even to-day the satisfaction of taking Baba's darshana. Though Baba has no body now, He lives there and everywhere, and will effect the welfare of the devotees even now as He was doing before when He was embodied. Saints like Baba never die, though they look like men, they are in reality God Himself.

Bapusaheb Jog's Sannyas

Hemadpant closes this chapter with the account of Jog's sannyas. Sakharam Hari alias Bapusaheb Jog was the uncle of the famous Varkari Vishnubuva Jog of Poona. After his retirement from Govt. Service (He was a Supervisor in the P.W. Department) in 1909 A.D., he came and lived in Shirdi with his wife. He had no issue. Both husband and wife loved Baba and spent all their time in worshipping and serving Baba. After Megha's death, Bapusaheb daily did the arati ceremony in the Masjid and Chavadi till

Baba's maha-samadhi. He was also entrusted with the work of reading and explaining Jnaneshwari and Ekanathi Bhagawat in Sathe's Wada to the audience. After serving for many years, Jog asked Baba - "I have served you so long, my mind is not yet calm and composed, how is it that my contact with Saints has not improved me? When will You bless me?" - Hearing the Bhakta's prayer Baba replied - "In due time your bad actions (their fruit or result) will be destroyed, your merits and demerits will be reduced to ashes, and I shall consider you blessed, when you will renounce all attachments, conquer lust and palate, and getting rid of all impediments, serve God whole-heartedly and resort to the begging bowl (accept sannyas)." After some time, Baba's words came true. His wife predeceased him and as he had no other attachment, he became free and accepted sannyas before his death and realized the goal of his life.

Baba's Nectar-like words

The kind and merciful Sai Baba, said many a time the following sweet words in the Masjid - "He who loves Me most, always sees Me. The whole world is desolate to him without Me, he tells no stories but Mine. He ceaselessly meditates upon Me and always chants My name. I feel indebted to him who

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surrenders himself completely to Me and ever remembers Me. I shall repay his debt by giving him salvation (self-realization). I am dependent on him who thinks and hungers after Me and who does not eat anything without first offering it to Me. He who thus comes to Me, becomes one with Me, just as a river gets to the sea and becomes merged (one) with it. So leaving out pride and egoism and with no trace of them, you should surrender yourself to Me Who am seated in your heart."

Who is this ME?

Sai Baba expounded many a time Who this ME (or I) is. He said "You need not go far or anywhere 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."

Hemadpant, therefore, makes a bow to the readers and requests them humbly and lovingly that they should love and respect all Gods, saints and devotees. Has not Baba often said "He who carps and cavils at others, pierces Me in the heart and injures Me, but he that suffers and endures, pleases Me most." Baba thus pervades all beings and creatures and besets them on all sides. He likes nothing but love to all beings. Such nectar, pure auspicious ambrosia always flowed from Baba's lips. He therefore, concludes -Those who lovingly sing Baba's fame and those who hear the same with devotion, both become one with Sai.

Bow to Shri Sai - Peace be to all