



CHAPTER XXXVII

Chavadi Procession

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

Preliminary

Blessed is Sai's life for His devotees, blessed is His daily routine. His ways and actions are indescribable. Some times He was intoxicated with Brahmanand (divine bliss) and at other times, completely Self-absorbed. While doing so many things at the same time, He was yet unconcerned with them. Though He seemed at times quite inactive He was not idle or dozing; He always abided in His own Self. Though He looked calm and placid as the 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 Celibate, as everybody knows. May the 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 constantly remember 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 near the Masjid. He slept in the Masjid and in the Chavadi on alternate days. This alternate sleeping at both these places 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 day of retiring to the Chavadi came, people flocked to the Masjid and did Bhajan in the Mandap (courtyard) for a few hours. Behind them was a beautiful Palanquin, to the right a Tulsi-vrindavan, and in front Baba adorned His seat, and there were the devotees singing 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. Outside in the open, some trimmed their Divatyas (torches), some decorated the palanquin, some stood with cane-sticks in their hands and hailed victory to Baba. The corners were decorated with buntings. In the Masjid, rows of burning oil lamps shed their light. Baba's horse 'Shyam-karna' stood fully decorated outside. Then Taty Patil came with a group of men to Baba and asked Him to be ready. Baba sat quiet in His place, till Taty Patil came and helped Him to get up by putting his arm under Baba's arm. Taty Patil called Baba, by the name of Mama (maternal uncle). 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 Chillim (tobacco-pipe) and tobacco, and placing a cloth over His shoulder became ready to start. Then Taty Patil placed a golden-embroidered beautiful Shela (shawl) over His body. After this, Baba himself put a few fuel sticks into the Dhuni to keep it alive and with his right hand extinguished the lamp burning near the Dhuni and then started for the Chavadi. Then all sorts of musical instruments, band and horns etc. gave out different sounds, and fire-works exhibited various coloured views. Men and women singing Baba's name, started walking, doing bhajan to the accompaniment of mridang and veena. Some danced with joy and some carried various flags. The Bhalgars¹ announced Baba's name, when He came on the steps of the Masjid. On two sides of Baba stood persons, who held Chamars² and others, who fanned Baba. On the way were spread folds of cloth, which Baba walked on, being supported by devotees' hands, Taty Patil held the left hand and Mhalsapati the right, and Bapusaheb Jog held the Chhatra (umbrella) over His head. In this fashion, Baba marched on to the Chavadi. The fully decorated horse, named Shyamkarna led the way and behind him, were all the carriers, waiters, musical players and the crowd of devotees. Hari-naam (the name of the Lord) was being chanted to the accompaniment of music, as also the name of Sai. In this manner the procession reached the corner, and everyone who joined this party, seemed pleased and delighted.

1. Bhalgars – Uniformed Escorts

2. Chamar – A bundle of animal hair fixed at one end of a stick

On reaching this corner, Baba stood facing the Chavadi and shone with a peculiar aura. It seemed as if the face of Baba took over the glory of the rising sun. Baba stood there with a concentrated mind, facing the north, as if He was signalling something. All the instruments played music, while Baba moved His right hand 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 radiance and beauty, and all the persons viewed this lustre to their hearts content. Words fail to describe the splendour of this scene. Some times Mhalsapati began to dance, as if possessed by some Deity; but all were surprised to see that Baba's concentration was least disturbed. With a lantern in his hand, Tatya Patil walked on Baba's left side and Bhagat Mhalsapati on the right, holding in 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 there. Baba walked at very slow pace. Bhaktas followed on both sides with love and devotion. With joy permeating the whole atmosphere of the place, the procession reached the Chavadi. Those days are gone now. Nobody can see them in future, but by remembering and visualizing that sight, we can bring solace and ecstasy to our minds.

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

Nanasaheb Nimonkar held the Chhatra (State umbrella) with its beautiful pendants, which moved in a circle, with its supporting stick. Bapusaheb Jog washed His Feet in a silver dish, offered 'Arghya' and worship with due rituals, then besmeared His arms with sandal paste

and offered Him Tambul (betel-leaves). Baba sat on the Asan (Gadi), while Tatyā and others kept standing. 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 Tatyā Patil, who drew a flame out of it by inhaling a deep breath through his mouth and then gave it to Baba. After Baba had His smoke, it was given to Bhagat Mhalsapati 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 kneaded by pot-makers, dried in the 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 around His neck and gave Him scent and bunches of flowers. Baba, Who was an Incarnation of dispassion, 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 and the musical instruments played their auspicious tunes. When this Arati was over, the devotees returned home, one by one saluting Baba and taking His leave. When Tatyā Patil, after offering Chillim, Attar (scent) and rose-water, stood to depart, Baba said to him lovingly, "Guard Me properly, Go if you like but return sometimes at night and enquire for Me." On replying in the affirmative, Tatyā Patil left the Chavadi and went home. Then, Baba Himself prepared His bed. He arranged some sheets 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 Baba and His Chavadi procession daily before they retire and go to bed.

Bow to Shri Sai – Peace be to all