



CHAPTER XXXVIII

Baba's Handi – Disrespect of Shrine - Kala or Hodge Podge – Cup of Butter-milk

In the last chapter, we described Baba's Chavadi procession. In this, we take up Baba's Handi (cooking pot), and some other subjects.

Preliminary

Oh, blessed Sadguru Sai, we bow to You, Who has given happiness to the whole world, accomplished the welfare of the devotees and have removed the affliction of those, who have resorted to Your Feet. By being very liberal and also being the protector and saviour of the bhaktas, who surrender themselves to You, You have Incarnated Yourself in this world to oblige mankind and do them good. The liquid essence of Pure Self was poured into the mould of Brahma¹ and out of this has come out the crest-jewel of the saints – Sai. This Sai is Atmaram Himself. He is the Abode of the Perfect Divine Bliss. After having attained Himself all objects of life, He made His devotees established on the path.

Baba's Handi

Different Sadhanas (means of accomplishments) are prescribed in our scriptures for different ages. Tapa (penance) is recommended for Krita age, Dnyan (knowledge) for Treta age, Yagnya (sacrifice) for Dwapara age and Daan (Charity) for Kali (present) age. Of all the charities, giving food is the best one. We are much perturbed, when we get no food at noon. Other beings feel similarly under such circumstances. After knowing this, he, who gives food to the poor and hungry, is the best donor or charitable person. The Taittiriya Upanishad says that "Food is Brahma; from food all the creatures are born and by food they live, and after having departed, into food again they enter." When an Atithi (guest) comes to our door at noon, it is our duty to welcome him by giving him food. Other kinds of charities, viz. giving away wealth, property and clothes etc., require some discrimination but in the matter of food no such consideration is necessary. If anybody

1. Brahma – The God of Creation

comes to our door at noon, he should be served forthwith; and if lame, crippled, blind and diseased persons come, they should be fed first and the able-bodied persons and our relations afterwards. The merit of feeding the former is much greater, than that of feeding the latter. Other kinds of charities are imperfect without this Anna-daan (donation of food), just as stars without the moon, necklace without its pendant, crown without its pinnacle, pond without a lotus, Bhajan without devotion, married lady without the Kumkum-mark, song without a sweet voice or butter-milk without salt. Just as Varan (pulse-soup) excels all other dishes, Anna-daan is the best of all merits. Now, let us see how Baba prepared food and distributed it to others.

It has been stated before that, Baba required very little food for Himself, and what ever little He wanted was obtained by begging from a few houses. But when He decided to distribute food to all, He made all preparations, Himself. He depended on nobody and troubled none, in this matter. First He went to the bazaar and bought all the things, corn, flour, spices etc., paying cash. He also did the grinding. In the open court-yard of the Masjid, He arranged a big hearth and after lighting a fire, He kept a Handi over it with a proper measure of water. There were two kinds of Handis, one small and the other big. The former provided food for 50 persons, the latter for 100. Some times He cooked 'Mithe Chaval' (sweet rice), and at other times 'Biryani' with meat. At times, in the boiling Varan (soup), He let in small balls of thick or flat bread of wheat flour. He grinded the spices on a stone-slab and put the thin pulverized spices, into the cooking-pot. He took all pains to make the dishes very palatable. He prepared 'Ambil' by boiling jawari-flour in water and later mixing to it butter-milk, and then boiled both together. With the food, He distributed this Ambil to all alike. To see whether the food was properly cooked or not, Baba rolled up the sleeve of His Kafni and put His bare arm, in the boiling cauldron, without fear, and churned (moved) the whole mass from side to side and up and down. There was no mark of burn on His arm nor fear on His face. When the cooking was over, Baba got the pots in the Masjid and had them duly consecrated by the Moulvi (Muslim priest). First He sent part of the food as Prasad to Mhalsapati and Tatyapa Patil, and then He served the remaining contents with His own hand to all the poor and helpless people, to their heart's content. Really blessed and fortunate must be those people, who got food, prepared by Baba and served by Him.

Somebody may raise a point here and ask : “Did Baba distribute vegetarian and nonvegetarian food as Prasad to all His devotees?” The answer is plain and simple. Those who were accustomed to non-vegetarian food, were given non-vegetarian food from the Handi as Prasad and those who were not so accustomed were given vegetarian meal. He never created in them any wish or desire to indulge in this food. There is a principle that, when a Guru himself gives anything as Prasad, the disciple who thinks and doubts whether it is acceptable or otherwise, goes to perdition (future misery). In order to see, whether any disciple has imbibed this principle, Baba at times put them to tests. For instance, on an Ekadashi day, He gave some rupees to Dada Kelkar and asked him to go in person to Korhala to get meat from there. This Dada Kelkar was an orthodox Brahmin and adhered to all orthodox manners in his life. He knew that offering wealth, grain and clothes etc. to a Sadguru was not enough; but that implicit obedience to Him and prompt compliance with His order was the real dakshina, that pleased Him most. So Dada Kelkar dressed himself and started for the place. Then Baba called him back and said, “Don’t go yourself; but send somebody.” Then, Dada sent his own servant, Pandu, for the purpose. When Baba saw him going, He asked Dada to call him back and cancelled that programme. On another occasion Baba asked Dada, just to see how the saltish ‘Biryani’ (mutton dish) was done. The latter replied casually that, it was all right. Then, Baba said to him, “Neither have you seen it with your eyes, nor tasted it with your tongue, then how could you say that it was good? Just take off the lid and see!” While saying this Baba caught his arm and thrust it into the pot and added, “Take some out of this leaving aside your orthodox ways and taste a little.” When a wave of real love rises in a mother’s mind, she pinches her child and when he begins to cry, she hugs him close to her bosom. Similarly, Baba, in a true motherly way, pinched Dada Kelkar in this way. Really, no saint or Guru will ever force his orthodox disciple, to eat food forbidden in his religion.

The Handi business went on for some time till 1910, and was stopped thereafter. As stated before, Das Ganu spread the fame of Baba by his kirtans, far and wide, in the Mumbai Presidency and people from that part of the country began to flock to Shirdi, which became very soon a place of pilgrimage. The devotees brought with them various articles for presentation and offered various dishes of food as Naivaidya. The quantity of Naivaidya offered by them was so much that, the Fakirs

and paupers could feed themselves to their heart's content, leaving some surplus behind. Before stating how Naivaidya was distributed, we shall refer to Nanasaheb Chandorkar's story, showing Baba's regard for local shrines and deities.

Nanasaheb's Disrespect of a Shrine

By drawing inferences or guessing in their own way, some people said that Sai was a Brahmin and some said that He was a Muslim. In Reality, He belonged to no caste. No one knew definitely when He was born, and in what community, and who His parents were. Then how could He be a Muslim or Brahmin? If He was a Muslim, how could He keep Dhuni ever burning in the Masjid, how could there be a Tulsi-vrindavan there, how could He allow the blowing of conches and ringing of bells, how could He allow all the different forms of Hindu worship there? Had He been a Muslim, could He have ears pierced and could He have spent money from His pocket for repairing Hindu temples? On the contrary, He never tolerated the slightest disrespect to Shrines and Deities.

Once Nanasaheb Chandorkar came to Shirdi with his 'Sadhu' – husband of his wife's sister, Mr. Biniwale. When they went to the Masjid and sat before Baba, the latter suddenly got angry with Nanasaheb and said, "You have been so long in My company then why do you behave like this?" Nanasaheb at first did not understand anything and humbly requested Baba to explain. Baba asked him, when did he come to Kopergaon and how he came to Shirdi from there Nanasaheb then at once realized his mistake. He usually worshipped the Shrine of Datta, on the banks of the Godavari, at Kopergaon on his way to Shirdi but this time he dissuaded his relative, who was a Datta Bhakta, from going to that Shrine in order to avoid delay and drove straight. He confessed all this to Baba and told Him that, while bathing in the Godavari, a big thorn went into his foot and gave him much trouble. Baba said that, that was a slight punishment he met and warned him to be more careful in future.

Kala (hotch-potch)

To revert to the distribution of the Naivaidya : After the Arati was over and after Baba sent away the people with Udi and blessings, He

went inside and sat behind a curtain with His back to the Nimbar for meals, with two rows of the intimate devotees, one on each side. The Bhaktas brought Naivaidya, containing a variety of food, such as puris, mande, polis, basundi, sanza, fine rice etc and kept waiting outside, for prasad, consecrated by Baba. All the foods were mixed in a hotch-potch and placed before Baba. He offered it to God and consecrated it. Then portions of the same were given to the persons, waiting outside and the rest was served to the group of devotees inside, with Baba at the centre. The Bhaktas sitting in two rows then dined to their heart's content. Baba asked Shama and Nanasaheb Nimonkar, daily to serve the consecrated food to all persons, sitting inside and look to their individual needs and comforts. This they did very carefully and willingly. Every morsel of the food thus partaken gave them fulfilment and satisfaction. Such sweet, lovely and consecrated food it was ! Ever auspicious and ever holy!

Cup of Butter-milk

Once Hemadpant had eaten to his full capacity in this company, when Baba offered him a cup of butter-milk. Its white appearance pleased him, but there was no space for it. He however, took only a sip, on seeing his faltering attitude, Baba said, "Drink it all, you won't get any such opportunity, hereafter." He drank it off then, and found that Baba's words were prophetic, for He passed away after a brief period.

Now readers, we have certainly to thank Hemadpant. He drank the cup of butter-milk; but has supplied us with sufficient quantity of nectar in the form of Baba's Leelas. Let us drink this nectar to our heart's content and be satisfied and happy.

Bow to Shri Sai – Peace be to all