

Part 1 - Chapter 25 - Nirvana

Shirdi Che Sai Baba - Dr. Keshav Bhagwant Gavankar

CHAPTER 25

NIRVANA [Merging Into Brahman]

Yogeshwar Shamsunder Sai Baba, An Avatar, left His mortal coil on Tuesday, October 15th, 1918 at 2:35 p.m.. It was Vijaya-Dashami and Ekadashi both on the same day. Around September 25th, 1918, He was down with fever. On October 9th or 10th, Baba's favourite brick broke into two pieces. It was with Him since He came to Shirdi. The brick was roasted and therefore was not a brittle one. He used to protect and cherish it with utmost care. Wrapping the brick in a cloth, He used to keep it under His head while sleeping. Mhalsapati and Kashiram Shimpi used to wash, worship and keep it near the pillar of fire (Dhuni). Then Mahadu Phasale did that job with the same care.

Baba had great concern for the brick. Not only 'concern' but He 'loved' that brick. On that ominous day, someone dropped it on the floor and it broke into pieces. When Baba came to know about it, He also broke down with sorrow and said, "I have lost my intimate companion. It is not the brick, but My fate that has been broken into pieces". With the breaking of the brick, Baba's health declined. He had fever for 2/3 days. Then He stopped His food-intake and begging rounds and sat quietly in the masjid. Just 5/6 days after the splitting of the brick, He merged into Brahman.

Prior to the incident, Baba's words indicated about His Nirvana. But no one understood the significance of them. When Baba had fever, Kakasaheb Dixit was there with Him in Shirdi. But Baba purposely sent him back to Mumbai. He let nobody know the exact time of His departure. He was conscious till the last moment and was advising devotees not to lose heart. Dixit was in touch with other devotees and returned to Shirdi as soon as he heard about Baba's declining health. Nana Nimonkar was in Baba's service for 2/3 previous years. Buti, Jog, Bhate, Madhavrao Deshpande and all others were in Shirdi around Baba. Going to Lendi baug, going for alms and other routines were continued till He became too frail to walk. He needed support while walking or standing. Bapusaheb Buti and Namonkar helped Him for that. Both of them almost used to lift Him and take Him to the destination. Only two days before Nirvana, the routine was discontinued. Baba Himself was trying to raise the spirit of the devotees, telling them not to worry. He took care that nobody would know about the approaching end of the Avatar. He was constantly alert till the last second comforting the people around.

On October 15, afternoon Aarti was carried out. Baba then asked the devotees, Bapusaheb, Kakasaheb and others to go to their houses for taking lunch.. Actually these people used to take lunch with Baba everyday. But that day He wanted them to go home. Only Bayaji, Bhagoji, Laxman Shimpi, Nanasaheb Nimonkar and very few other devotees were with Baba when He breathed His last. Madhavrao was sitting on the steps and Laxmibai Shinde was by the side of Baba. She used to bring rotis and subji for Baba everyday. One day Baba was standing by the wall, when Laxmibai came and joined her palms in prostration. Baba said,

“Laxmi, I am very hungry”. She went home, prepared rotis and vegetables and brought them to Baba. He took the plate of rotis and placed it before a dog. Laxmibai said, “Baba, what is this? You were hungry; then why did You give it to the dog?”

He said, “Why? Is the dog not a living being? It also feels hungry. I and the dog are one”. This was a direct precept to Laxmibai from Baba. Just five minutes before His Nirvana, He gave total nine rupees to Laxmibai. Then He said, “I am not comfortable here; take Me to the Wada. There I would feel better” (Buti Wada also known as Dagadi Wada, now Samadhi Mandir).

This was the last command Baba gave. He was sitting by the side of Bayaji. His respiration became slow. Bhagoji saw it and he called out for Nimonkar who was sitting in a helpless mood. He hurriedly rose to bring a kettle of water and tried to pour it into Baba’s mouth but He did not swallow it. It spilt out. Nimonkar screamed loudly, “Oh Deva!”. Because of his cry, Baba opened His eyes for the last time, and faintly responded saying “Ah...” In His last moment He leaned on Bayaji’s shoulder and He breathed his last....

All who were present there, sensed what had happened. Everybody was wailing and lamenting with deep sorrow. It was a very tragic scene. The devotees had lost their Bhagwan, their God, their mother, father, brother, friend and everything. With the exit of Sai Baba from this mortal world, an era had come to an end. After that sorrowful moment, all had to face a practical difficulty. Obsequies were to be carried out; but in what manner? It became a matter of dispute. Muslims wanted to do it according to their religion and Hindu devotees, who were in majority, insisted that it was their right. Sai Baba was a great saint. It did not make difference whether He was a Hindu or a Muslim. Badebaba, Imam and other Muslims of Shirdi took hold of the Body. According to them Baba was a great ‘Pir’ and the body should be buried. They also wanted all the rights of the ‘Durgah’ (Tomb) thereafter. Baba had never spoken about the funeral rites to any of His close devotees. Only His last command was to take Him to Buti-Wada. After lot of discussion, all agreed to accept His last wish. So the digging for ‘Samadhi place’ was started in Buti-Wada.

But next morning there was some opposition. Muslims thought, if the “Samadhi” was built in a private property of a Hindu; it would not be under public rights. So they were rather displeased. Many high-brow Hindus also were of the same opinion. Some suggested that Baba always used to sit in Dwarkamai and it was the appropriate place for His Samadhi. But Muslims ruled out the suggestion saying that a tomb in a masjid was not allowed in their religion. News of the demise and the dispute spread together. Mamlatdar of Nagar and Amirbhai from Mumbai reached Shirdi. They tried to estimate the opinions. But the unanimous decision was not in sight. Mamlatdar then told the people with admonition that if they would not concur the decision, they would have to go to the Collector at Nagar; then his orders would be final and binding on all.

Kakasaheb Dixit was given the responsibility of going to the Collector and doing the needful. In that situation, the Muslim devotees thought that to maintain the harmony amongst different castes and religions the dispute should be resolved peacefully. On only one condition that there would not be any objection for them to enter the Wada for taking darshan, all Muslims agreed on building the Samadhi in Buti-Wada. Tatya Kote-Patil and Ramchandra Kote-Patil convinced the Hindu devotees who were initially against it. Seeing, the devotees had united the Mamlatdar of Kopargaon gave the required orders.

On Wednesday evening Baba's body was brought to the Wada in a procession and kept in the sanctum. Coincidentally the length and breadth of the place was exactly matching to the requisite. Building of Samadhi was then completed without any hindrance. Since the first day all the rituals like worship, Aarti, etc. were carried out according to Hindu religion and nobody raised any objection to it. The famous and sacred brick, even though split, is kept in the Samadhi near Baba's head. Let us go back to year 1911-1912. Suddenly Baba took seriously ill. All the people thought that He might not survive. Nanasaheb Chandorkar informed most of the devotees to come and have a last darshan. Accordingly many devotees congregated in Shirdi. Many started Japa, Veda-chanting, Chandi-Path, Laghu-Rudra etc. for improvement in Baba's condition. But the ailment grew serious. All were scared whether the last thread of hope would break.

Some close devotees had different worry in their mind. They secretly discussed about what should be done if the worst thing happened. The question was if Baba's body should be taken to Durgah as Muslims do, or to build a Samadhi according to Hindu-customs. Nanasaheb, Kakasaheb Dixit, Bapusaheb Jog, Balasaheb Bhate, Deo, Tatya Kote-Patil and others decided to ask Baba. He only would show a way out. If He determines as to what would be proper, then there would no dispute. But who would ask Baba? All of them chose Nanasaheb as a representative. He said, "For me too, it is a very difficult task". All this discussion was going on in Dixit-Wada. Just then a person came from Dwarkamai with a message from Baba. He asked, "Where is Nanasaheb? I have a message for you, from Baba". "Here I am! Tell me", said Nanasaheb. Baba says, "Do not worry about my dead body right now. I am not going to die in this ailment. You carry on your work. I Myself shall dispose off My body when time comes".

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