

Shirdi Sai Baba's Dwarakamai - A Spiritual Oasis

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In Chapter 22 of Shri Sai Satcharita Sai Baba says, “*Mashidmayee is her name, will she ever go back on her promise?*” A mother is always full of love and tenderly merciful towards her child. Mashid or ma+shi+da means refuge at the feet of Lord Shiva. In Shirdi the *Parabramha* gave refuge and is still giving refuge to multitudes of devotees that flock there. He called it *Dwaravati* and *Dwaraka Maatha*, and said that those who sit in her lap should be fearless as no harm will befall them. She was *mothi Krupalu*, full of compassion and would take you across the ocean of worldly existence.

MEANING OF “DWARAKAMAI”

The word *Dwaraka* can be broken into *Dwar* + *Ka*. *Dwar* means the door and *Ka* means Brahman. Thus, it is the door or gateway to get to or reach Brahman. *Dwaraka* is that place where one can get freedom from the bondage of Karmic actions. *Dwaraka* is also known as *Mukthidham* and *Mokshpuri*. Narad Muni extols *Dwaraka* saying that it is a sacred *Yagna Bhumi* that bestows *moksha* on the pilgrims. By having its darshan, one becomes charity however miniscule, becomes immortal. Our *Dwaraka Mai* grants all this and more. It was here that Baba spent 60 years in bliss. Here Baba granted his devotees wishes and nurtured them like the mother tortoise. Finally, he took *Maha Samadhi* in his beloved *Mashidmayee*.

THE APPEARANCE OF DWARAKAMAI

This *masjid* that Baba extolled was old and dilapidated. There were deep pits and huge holes in the floor. Each and every nook and corner had garbage dumped in it. It was in this ambience that he stayed blissfully smoking his *chillim*, by day and night. To appease his hunger he took *Bhiksha* (alms) from five houses. Whether the food was stale or

delicious he knew not. On his body wore torn and tattered clothes and then was it possible for the people to recognise his divinity. Often he roamed in the forest nearby. There he would sit under the *Babul* tree (a small tree full of thorns), often talking to some unknown entity and waving his hands about in a threatening manner. Baba's divinity dawned on the villagers only after Nanasahab Chandorkar's visits to Shirdi. He was convinced of Baba's Super-human powers and divinity. Although, *Gangagiri Maharaj* had told the villagers this, “*He is a valuable diamond lying in a heap of rubbish. It is your good fortune that he has come to stay amongst you*”.

The *Sadhguru* manifests to uplift his devotees. His only concern is their welfare in every aspect of life. He is eager that they progress spiritually and that they are filled with love and bliss. The devotees are also eager to do *Guru Seva*, charitable deeds and fulfil his wishes.

RENOVATION OF THE MASJID

Nana Saheb's heart was bursting with love and devotion. He was eager to renovate and repair the old and dilapidated *Masjid*. His only thought was, “How will I get permission to make the *masjid* more habitable?” Baba however was quite content and did not grant him permission. Nonetheless with this thought in his mind he went to Shirdi. The next morning Nana was standing outside the *masjid* and waiting for *Mhalsapati*, who had gone to get his *bhiksha*. Having received it, he was about to enter the *masjid*, when Nana accosted him. Nana was eager to tell him of his plan. At that very moment Baba called out to *Mhalsapati*. He immediately went to Baba, who said, “*Arre Bhagat, who is standing outside?*” *Mhalsapati* told him that it was Nanasahab Chandorkar. Innocently Baba said, “Is that so? *Bhagat* I wanted to have your opinion on this matter. That Nana says, “Baba, I would like to build a new *masjid*. Now don't you think our old *masjid* is good

enough for us?" To this Mhalsapati replied, "*Baba let him build a new masjid. It will be very useful for both of us, as we will have a place to sit and to sleep when the time comes.*" Then Baba agreed and gave his consent. As soon as Baba gave his consent, Mhalsapati called out to Nana and asked him to start the work. Nana immediately brought a coconut and broke it. Thus, on Mhalsapati's advice Nana was allowed to renovate the *masjid*. And Kaka Saheb Dixit was allowed to do the flooring. The three carpenter brothers *Kondaji, Gabaji* and *Tukaram Sutar* provided the greatest help. All the woodwork was done by them. After the renovation, the management of the *masjid* continued with them for many years. Till Baba's *Mahasamadhi* Tukaram undertook the sweeping of the *masjid*.

DWARAKAMAI IN THE 1920s

Each and every article in Dwaraka Mai fills devotee's heart with love, joy and peace. Baba spent 60 years here; his touch has filled every stone, brick and woodwork with life. This is the place where he fondly asked about each devotee's welfare and told *Goshties* (stories). Like a fond mother he fed devotees sweets. Sometimes he cut fruits into small pieces and put small morsels into their mouth. In the place that he sat there was a huge portrait painted by *Shamrao. R. Jaykar* that faces the south. Now a copy of that portrait is there and the original portrait is kept on the first floor of the museum. This masterpiece is so famous that it is often referred to as the Dwaraka Mai pose. In 1959 Shirdi Sai Baba Sansthan made some more renovations. In 1998 the Sansthan redid the *Dhuni Mai* and laid heat resistant bricks at the base. They also made a chimney. While this work was going on for a few days the *Jyot* (fire) was maintained in a small, temporary *Dhuni Mai*.

THE SABHAMANDAP (1911)

The area in front of Dwaraka Mai was a vacant plot. Devotees stood there and attended aratis, often in scorching heat and rain. Dixit thought that if a *Sabhamandap* or portico was built, it would provide shelter for devotees from the elements. He was determined to build it, no matter what it may cost. He bought tall iron pillars and angled brackets. On the day that Baba slept in chavadi, he and the other

devotees worked all night. The next morning, when Baba came to Dwaraka Mai, he swiftly pulled out the pillars. Dwaraka Mai had two parts, the *Sanctum Sanctorum* which is the *Masjid* or Dwaraka Mai and the *Sabhamandap*. The *Sanctum Sanctorum* faces east. Three steps lead inside, it is 17' in length and 15' in breadth. The entrance to the *Sabhamandap* faces south. The roof has CI corrugated tin sheets. These sheets were donated by Baba's ardent devotee Capt. *Darruwala* as a gesture of gratitude. Through his mysterious ways Baba saved him, his crew and some ships from the enemy during the *Russo-Japanese war of 1905*. The roof is supported by 12 iron pillars, 15' long.

THE BELL

This huge brass bell is tied above and to the left of the entrance of the *Sabhamandap*. It is not the original bell and has been changed many times. It is rung three times a day, at 4a.m, 11.30a.m and at 8.30p.m. It is rung by the priest, calling the devotees for the arati. If it is rung at any other time it signals that an untoward incident has occurred somewhere in the village. The villagers assemble in the pavilion and go to the place of the calamity and set it right. The practice continues to date, hence the gong is tied to the grill.

FLAGS [NISHANS]

Gopal Gund was devoted to Baba. He did not have any children but with Baba's blessings a son was born to him. He felt that an annual yatra (fair) should be held in Shirdi. He told the prominent devotees of Shirdi, like Tatyia Kote, Dada patil and Shama about it. They all liked the idea very much and everyone started making preparations for it. However *Kulkarni* (the Revenue officer) opposed it. Hence the District Collector did not grant them permission to hold the fair. But they single mindedly pursued it and finally got permission to hold the fair.

THE DHUNI MAI

The everlasting *dhuni* was lit by Baba himself, more than 150 years ago and is still burning. The word *dhuni* possibly comes from the root word *dhun*, which means to kindle or waft. Even during the cholera epidemic, when the panchayat ordained that no fuel cart be allowed to come into the village, Baba

went to the fuel cart and bought wood for his dhuni. The dhuni is 7' long and 5'2" wide. Devotees offer wood, gowri, ghee navdhanya and five types of wood to this sacred dhuni. Now this cannot be done by individual devotees as the dhuni is boarded with a mesh. This is a precaution taken by the Sansthan in order to preserve Dhuni Mai's sanctity. Every day at about 11a.m, *dhuni puja* is done by the Sansthan. Eleven coconut, wood and gowri are offered to Dhuni Mai at this time. The priest from the Samadhi Mandir does *Vaishva Dev (Agni) puja* with *anna ahuti* (cooked rice mixed with ghee). Sagunmeru Naik did this puja daily upon Baba's instructions. Every action that Baba did is pregnant with wisdom. All systems of philosophy, all the *yogas* and *'isms'* can be found in his life. He life itself is teaching depending on how one can learn from it.

THE NIMBAR OR ALLAH MIA CHE JAGHA

The nimbar or Allah Mia che jagha (the place of Allah Mia) is the arched structure in the wall. It is in the western wall of Dwaraka Mai. It is garlanded daily and often is venerated with a shawl. In a masjid the nimbar is said to represent the Darga of Mecca. The devout Muslims do Namaz in front of it. Mention is made of the nimbar in several places in the Shri Sai Satcharita. The Urs started in 1897. During that yatra (fair) the "*Sandal procession*" also took place. This procession is held in honour of great Muslim Saints. A detailed account of it is given under the heading "*The Urs and Sandal Procession*". This sandal procession was started by Amir shakkar Dalal of kohrala. Now the descendants of Abdul Baba carry on this tradition.

THE EVER BURNING LAMPS

Baba was very fond of lighted Divas (earthen lamps). From the beginning of his stay in Dwaraka Mai, Baba lit Divas daily. And they burnt perpetually. Baba celebrated Diwali with numerous lamps. In Shri Sai Satcharita, Chapter 5, the leela of his lighting lamps with water is given. One day the grocers refused to give him oil. He took empty tumbler that had a smidgen of oil in it. He filled it with water and drank it. Thus offering it to God and then lit the lamps. They burnt throughout the night.

PORTRAIT OF BABA IN FRONT OF DHUNI [DWARAKA MAI POSE]

This portrait is an oil painting by the famous artist Shyamrao Ramchandra Jaykar. Moreshwar Pradhan brought Jaikar to Shirdi and requested him to make two portraits of Baba. After Jaikar met Baba, he on his own accord made more than two paintings. This portrait was presented to the Sansthan after Baba's *Mahasamadhi*. It was installed the very place that Baba sat. As the portrait was made with Baba's consent, it has such incredible feature that when a devotee looks at it with love and devotion, he gets the "*living experience*" of Baba in it. This famous and beautiful portrait is a masterpiece and widely known as "*The Dwaraka Mai Pose*".

THE IDOL OF THE TIGER

This idol is on the right side of the stone. It was installed on 12-11-1969 and presented by Triambakrao Shripathrao Shiladar of Ozar village. Seven days before Baba took *Mahasamadhi the leela* of Baba giving *Sadgati* to this ailing tiger is given in Shri Sai Satcharita, Chapter 31.

THE REASON FOR WHY BABA CALL THE MASJID AS, "DWARAKA MAI"

In the *Skanda Purana* the definition of Dwaraka is, "The Place where the doors are open for all people regardless of caste, community and creed for accomplishing *Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha* is called *Dwaraka*." Baba's Masjid in Shirdi is open to one and all.

The Sanctum Sanctorum is closed at about 9pm., while the sabhamandap is left open throughout the night. Before the Sanctum Sanctorum is closed, it is swept and cleaned, a *Zaari* (copper vessel) full of water is placed in front of Baba's photograph, the mosquito net is hung around the photograph and a lit *kandil* (lantern) is hung above the *kathada* [railing]. In 1996 this *Kandil* started swinging, many devotees felt that it was an omen, others felt that some great change or event was about to take place in Shirdi. Many devotees gathered around to behold the event. The place of the *Kandil* was changed, yet the swinging did not stop. This happened for about a week. The only event that occurred was that

Sivanesan Swamiji died on 12th Feb 1996. He loved Dwaraka Mai and from the early 1960's looked after it with tender and loving care.

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