

The Sculpting of Shirdi Sai Baba's Murthy (Idol) By Shilpa Maharshi Balaji Vasantrya Talim

S.D.K. Subhasree¹, Dr. A. Renuka²

¹Department of History, Govt. Arts College, Salem-7, T.N, India

²H.O.D, Associate Professor, Department of History, Govt. Arts College, Salem-8, T.N

Abstract- Sai Baba's Statue in Shirdi, which has become the most mesmerizing divine image of Baba, was installed on 7th October 1954, Vijayadashami Day, thirty six years after Baba's Mahasamadhi. Balaji Vasantrya Talim was born in 1888 in Hyderabad. His father Vasantrya was a building contractor for the Nizam of Hyderabad. His father died early, leaving behind his wife Saraswathi, and three small children who migrated to Mumbai. After primary education, Balaji joined the J.J School of Art to Learn Sculpture. He won the "Dolly Khurshatjee" scholarship thus enabling him to complete his education. Balaji was a brilliant sculptor and painter, portraits being his speciality. In 1918 "Talim's Art Studio" was established. He won many prestigious awards, gold medals, and accolades. Balaji was a highly spiritual, religious, philosophical and a man of principles.

Index Terms- Vijayadasha, Nizam, Dolly Khurshatjee, Sculptor, Art Studio.

WHITE MARBLE FROM ITALY

The Statue, which has become such a famous and well-loved image of Baba, was not installed until 1954, and there is an intriguing story behind it - some white marble arrived from Italy at the Bombay docks, but nobody seemed to know anything about it-who it was for, or why it had come. In the absence of a claimant, the dockyard auctioned it and the purchaser offered it to the Shirdi Sansthan Temple authorities. Impressed by the quality of the marble, they wanted to use it for an image of Baba and gave the commission to Balaji Vasant Talim.

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPH AS A MODEL

However, Balaji Vasant Talim had only one black and white photo of Baba to use as his model and was struggling to get the likeness. One night Baba came

to him in a dream, remarked on his difficulties and then showed him his face from various angles, encouraging Talim to study it thoroughly and remember it well. This gave Talim the fillip he needed and after that the work flowed easily and the result exceeded all expectations.

DIVINE VOICE OF BABA

Shri Balaji Vasant Talim testified about this to *Sri Sai Narayan Baba*, as to how Baba himself had directed the sculpting of the statue and how at every stage, he could very clearly hear the divine voice of Baba guiding him.

APPROVAL FROM SANSTHAN

The Shirdi Sai Sansthan immediately approved this Mud Statue of Baba, on the basis of which the present Italian Marble Statue of Sai Baba was carved and installed in the Samadhi Shrine.

AIR POCKETS IN A MARBLE

In 1954, while working with his workers at the finishing stages of sculpting the almost ready marble Statue of Sai Baba, Shri. Balaji Talim found an Air Pocket in a small additional portion below the left knee of Baba's Statue, which had to be removed. It seemed dangerous, as in removing an Air Pocket from a Finished Statue, there was every risk of the entire portion coming down, thus leaving the Statue *Khandit* (Broken), which therefore could not be worshiped at all.

BALAJI TALIM'S PRAYER TO BABA

So the work stopped and Shri. Balaji Talim hesitated to strike and chisel out the additional portion. He

feared that the entire Statue might get destroyed and all his labour and time would go waste. He became nervous and prayed to Baba. *“Baba have mercy on me. Your Murthy is ready. Please Baba have mercy on me.”* Just then he then heard a voice within saying *“Balaji, Carry on”*.

MIRACLE OF SAI BABA

Balaji instructed his workers to carry on and chisel out the additional portion, but the workers refused to do so, fearing that the entire knee portion would just drop out. Eventually and quite nervously, Shri. Balaji Talim took the chisel and hammer himself and while praying *“Baba, help me”* gave a small stroke, touching the additional portion of the marble below the left knee. And to his great surprise, only the additional portion of the marble came down leaving the rest of Baba’s Statue intact. Seeing this, tears rolled down his eyes and he prostrated before Baba, started dancing and distributing sweets to all. As, he experienced such a wonderful miracle of Sai Baba.

BABA IS ALIVE IN STATUE

The 5’5” finished Idol of Sai Baba was taken throughout the village with pomp and ceremony. Baba’s Idol was so Life like that devotees like *Swami Sri Sai Saranananda* and *Laxmibai*, who had personally been with Baba, felt as if Baba had come back alive in the form of his idol.

PRANA PRATISTHA OF BABA’S IDOL

On 7th October 1954, Vijayadashami Day, this Life like Marble Statue of Sai Baba was installed on the platform of the Samadhi Shrine’s western side behind Baba’s Samadhi and the due formalities of Prana Pratistha were done by *Swami Saranananda* who had met Baba before His Mahasamadhi. Thus the Pran Prathistha of Baba’s Murty was performed with love, devotion and a great deal of joy. On the 50th anniversary of the idol in 2004, a three-day Yagna was performed in Lendi Bagh.

BABA’S DARSHAN TO TALIM

At the time of preparation of Baba’s Statue, one day Baba gave darshan to Shri. Balaji Talim and said,”

Finish the work and you will not do any other idol in future.” So Talim did not prepare any other idol since then and finally at the age of 82 on 25th December 1970 he breathed his last.

REFERENCES

- [1] Shri Saileela, Official Periodical, An article entitled, “Making of Sai Baba’s Idol” by Harihar Rautaray., dated 23rd May., 2015.
- [2] Vinny Chitluri., Baba’s Gurukul., New Delhi., 2009.
- [3] Vinny Chitluri., Ambrosia in Shirdi – Part – 1 & 2 (Baba’s Leelas Before 1918) Shirdi, 2002.