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Main

REMINISCENCE

Shri Ram Navami Festival (1930 A.D.) : A Report...

The details of this year's deposits and expenditure have been recorded in the ledger book. This year, many people had come from places like Nanded, Mukhed, Umri, Gavhan, Sangvi, Kalamnuri, Majhor, Mathri, Mumbai, Pune, Yaval, Andheri, Bandra, Indore, Mahu, Khamgaon, Pandharpur, Ahmednagar, Solapur, Puntambe and Handia. Amongst those who come every year, Papalal could not make it this year. The festival started from the 8th day of *Chaitra Shukla Paksha* (the waxing period of the moon). During these five days, about 3 to 4 thousand people were fed. About a hundred stalls were put up by some people from outside the village during this festival. Arrangements made by the government were also good. In these five days, sweet dishes like 'jalebi', 'boondi' and 'sheera' were prepared. As always, the pantry was managed very well by Govind Vyankati Mahajan (Mukhed) with the help of Chinaiyya Tambola Ramchandra and Malappa. The responsibility of serving up was given to Digambarrao Nandedkar, Rajeshwar, Jagannath Master, Ramrao Varudkar, Diwakar Deshpande and some more people. They did a great job. Baba Ramchandra Patewar could not take part in this due to some problem. One day, the Muslims in the village were served sweet fried rice; this charge went to Nagoba Vanjari, Narayan Vanjari-Maruti and a few more who took it up without making any fuss. About a hundred Muslims partook of this meal. On Ram Navami day, the flags were taken out in a procession in the evening and after that at night, because Hussain Sakkar Dalal could not come, all the Muslims in the village took out the Sandal Wood Procession and offered it on *Maharaj's Samadhi*. As Akolekar Daruwala fell sick, his son took charge of the firework's show. Firework firing the procession and the wrestling competitions were worth watching. This year, the wrestling show was a big success. Reason behind it was that Bapurao Raghoji Borawake, Taty Ganapati Patil, Vaman Manku, Ramchandradada, Bayaji Sakharam along with some other villagers helped to resolve the differences and got all the villagers together. With Your grace, it went off well. This year we did not receive as much donation as we should have received or receive every year for the wrestling competitions due to the bad crops. Still the show was a hit. All along the event, it was clear how good the old wrestling techniques can prove to be for our youth to be aware of their physical strength. Hence, the village chiefs should encourage organizations related to this sport. Next year, by Your grace, if we have a good yield of crop then they can think about it. On the full-moon day people belonging to *Mahar, Mang, Chambhar, Bhill, Vadari* were given 'halwa' *prasadam* (*prasadam* made of semolina, sugar and nuts) and Raghu Patil, Karbhari Mali, Baburao Nana took charge of this and did it well. Winnowing of rice and pulses was done by Lakshmi Bai Patil. Palanquin Procession was held on *Ekadashi* and *Gopalkala* on *Dwadashi*. Most of the people returned to their villages after *Gopalkala* and the rest after *Hanuman Jayanti*. May Baba bless them, along with their families, who worked so hard to make the celebrations a grand success and also those who rendered financial help. We are *Maharaj's* ignorant children, our well-being is in His hands. Knowingly or unknowingly, if we have committed any mistake or have gone wrong somewhere, may we be forgiven - I beseech. Like this, may this Das continue rendering his services, year after year.

A dustspeck at the feet of the saints
Dasganu

- Shri Saileela, year 7, Issue 12

Translated from Marathi into English by
Sumona Bagchi

Atma 'Ram' Sai 'Ram'

The greatness of *Shri Prabhu* Ramchandra and His importance needs no elaboration.

Prior to 1912, it was a practice to hold an *Urus* on the day of *Ram Navami*. The idea of holding such an *Urus* was initiated by an ardent devotee of Baba. His name was Gopalrao Gund.

With the blessings of and directions from Shri Sai Ram, the first ever *Ram Janmotsav* was celebrated in Shirdi in the year 1912 (before Shri Sai Baba laid down His mortal body).

The story of this first *Ram Janmotsav* is very amazing. It is narrated in great detail by Shri Laxman Ganesh alias Kakasaheb Mahajani (the then editor of 'Shri Saileela') in the issue of the periodical. It would be proper to reproduce his words. A free translation of the same follows –

“Gopalrao Gund was a government circle inspector of Kopargaon. He had married three times. But, none of the marriages succeeded in giving birth to a son. Later on he began visiting Baba and with His blessings a son was born. He began to think of a way to express his joy and this gave him the idea of holding an *Urus*.

Naturally, he discussed this idea with prominent residents of Shirdi like Taty Patil, Dada Kote Patil, Madhavrao Deshpande and others. Everyone approved the proposal. But, it was vehemently opposed by the Kulkarni of Shirdi. He even went to the extent of pointing out to the district collector that with the holding of such a gathering many people will be converging on Shirdi and this would give rise to health problems and an epidemic may get spread. The collector concurred with this view and denied permission to hold the *Urus*. Everybody was utterly disappointed. But, Baba supported the idea wholeheartedly. Therefore, things began automatically falling in place and the collector withdrew his first order and issued a second one – granting permission to the *Urus* ! With Baba's direction, it was decided to hold the *Urus* on the auspicious day of *Ram Navami*. Of course, Baba had decided upon the day after great thought and consideration. Because – on a later date – Baba gave permission to celebrate *Ram Navami* along with *Urus*. This Hindus as well as Muslims began celebrating a joint function of *Urus* and *Ram Navami*. This enhanced the feeling of brotherhood amongst these two communities.

The organizers succeeded in crossing the first hurdle of obtaining the collector's permission. But, there were many more on their path. The district of Nagar was known for water shortage and the auspicious day of celebration was in the height of summer – the month of *Chaitra*. In those days, there were only two main wells in whole of Shirdi. The water from one of them was salty, while in the other, the water level used to reach the bottom ! But, with Baba's blessings a miracle took place. He realized the plight of the pilgrims and threw some flowers into the well with saline water. And, the water began tasting sweet ! A big problem got resolved. To draw the water from the depths of the wells, a rope as long as 75-100 hands was needed. Pulling of the rope was a tiresome task. But, Taty Patil located a distant well, arranged to draw the water with the help of two bullocks.

Urus is a kind of fair and hence, would be incomplete without shops, entertainment shows, *tamasha*, wrestling and giant wheels. The organizers sent messengers to villages and towns around Shirdi and shopkeepers and the like came flocking to display their wares and talents.

Like Gopalrao Gund, Damuanna Kasar had also got a son with the blessings of Shri Baba. He concurred with Gopalrao's suggestion and on the auspicious day, began hoisting a flag on top of the *Masjid*. There used to be two flags hoisted on that day - Kasar's simple flag and Nanasahab Nimonkar's rich flag adorned with gold threads etc. Both these were made in the house of Kondaji Sutar. A procession wound its way from the lanes and bye-lanes of Shirdi carrying them and they were hoisted on the two sides of the *Masjid*. The practice is followed even today.

Sandal

Along with the practice of holding an *Urus*, another custom was also followed that of '*Sandal*'. A Muslim by the name Ameer Shakkar (from Village Korhala) sought permission of Baba and started '*Sandal*'.

Sandal means a paste made according to Muslim traditions out sandalwood. Its powder/paste are placed in a flat metal plate. *Ud* is burnt in the front of a procession and the plate is carried through the village. Ultimately, the parade arrives at the *Masjid*. Its walls are adorned with imprints of palms of the paste.

Ameer Shakkar bore the expenses of the material, musicians, lamps and fireworks. He passed away in 1923. His wife continued the tradition thereafter.

Muslim folks referred to Baba as a '*Peer*'. In cases of most of the *Peers*, *Sandal* is observed after they pass away. Therefore, Ameer Shakkar used to proudly announce that '*Sandal* is taken out during the lifetime of only the most fortunate and the most revered *Peers* !'... And Baba was one of them.

A Symbol of

Hindu - Muslim Unity

Thus, on the day of Ram *Navami*, a unique practice was started of taking out simultaneously two processions – a Hindu procession of the two flags and a Muslim procession of *Sandal*.

At that time, besides the usual religious festivals, this was the only festival being observed in Shirdi. It was a very important day for the residents of Shirdi and the towns and villages around it. Even people from far off places began visiting Shirdi to participate in it. Prominent amongst them were members of Radhakrishnaai's family.

Tatya Patil looked after the management of matters outside the *Masjid* while Radhakrishnaai took care of its interiors. Her place used to resemble a house, in which a marriage is to take place. Someone would be helping in making the flags, some others would be lending a hand in cutting paper flowers. Some would be cleaning silver articles, while others would be busy in cleaning food grains. The work would be carried out through out the day and even night.

Preparation of the *Masjid*

Dasganu *Maharaj* had written a letter to Shirdi Sansthan in 1917 about the statue of Lord Ram. It narrates the practice before the arrival of Radhakrishnaai in Shirdi.

'...At that time, Baba Himself used to wash the *Masjid* on the day of Ram *Navami*. Around mid-day, He brought a little oil and lit lamps. He purchased *gulal* showered it on His head, the *dhuni*, the three earthen lamps and the arch in the corner.'

Later on Radhakrishnaai assumed this responsibility.

The work of cleaning the *Masjid* would be carried out only when Baba was not in there.

As everyone knows, Baba slept in the *chavadi* on alternate nights. On the *chavadi* night before Ram *Navami*, Radhakrishnaai would arrive at the *Masjid* with her people. Men and women of all ages and from all walks of life would participate with the intention of serving Baba. It was a scene worth watching.

They would carry Baba's belongings with great care, love and affection to the *sabha mandap* area. The holy fire from *dhuni* would be brought down and kept alive. Radhakrishnaai

would play a major role in this.

After this, the work of washing the *Masjid* would be taken up. Due to the ever alive fire of the *dhuni*, the walls and woodwork would have become dark and covered with smoke. These would be cleaned with soap water and pieces of rough rope. 15-20 people would be busy with this. Another 15-20 would be fetching water from wells which were at some distance.

After thus washing the *Masjid*, Baba's things would be placed back to their places. The holy fire would once again light the *dhuni*. Everyone would now leave the *Masjid*. By now, it would be 4 a.m.

When Baba arrived at the *Masjid* the next day, He would find it to be completely transformed.

However, there was one solitary year, in which the above practice (of doing this work during Baba's absence) was not followed. That year for some reason the *Masjid* could not be washed during *chavadi* night. However, some people gathered courage and approached Baba. After lot of cajoling, He agreed and moved to the *mandap*. The group was overjoyed and began the work of cleaning and painting with great enthusiasm. The work got over before evening itself. Baba was in a lighthearted mood. He cut jokes and encouraged the folks. However, everyone was cautious. They were aware that, though He had given permission, He would be equally unpredictable and could lose His temper. Therefore, only when the work was complete, everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

Annadan

While the work of transforming the *Masjid* was going on the night previous to Ram *Navami*, in Radhakrishnaai's house another big task was undertaken. The act of giving away of food (*Annadan*) was dear to the heart of Baba. Therefore, in Radhakrishnaai's house, preparation for cooking of food on a large scale would go on. The cooks were not hired hands. They were devotees of Baba. In one corner, someone from say *malgujar* community would be preparing 5-10 *payalees* (a measure of weight in use at that time) of *bundi*, while simultaneously reciting Namsmaran. Somewhere else, 2-3 men would be bringing down vessels, which contained just cooked *sakhar bhat*. At a third place, 5-7 ladies and gents would be making *laddoos*. Besides these, in the morning, on a large scale items such as *bhat*, *bhaji*, *poli*, *varan* etc. would be prepared. The people will sit in rows and have a hearty meal. At least, two such groups would have food in Baba's presence. In the *mandap*, lot of poor men and women, *fakirs*, free-loaders etc. would have their fill."

How beautifully Kakasaheb has penned down the scene and happenings on the auspicious day of Ram *Navami* !

Today's mammoth scale

After Baba left for His heavenly abode, the number of people coming for the *yatra* diminished to some extent. However, from 1925-26, the number kept on increasing every year. The trend has continued till today.

75 years have been passed since Kakasaheb described the event. However, even today Shri Sai Sansthan celebrates Ram *Navami*, *Guru Pournima* and Sai's *Punyatithi* with great fanfare, love and affection. And we – His devotees – witness and participate in these celebrations with incessant enthusiasm.

All the trustees, prominent citizens of Shirdi and devotees take part in all the above activities.

The program of Ram *Navami* as celebrated in Shirdi today -

The Ram *Navami* function is spread over 3 days.

Every morning, as usual, *kakad aarati* is performed. On the day of Ram *Navami*, the *Samadhi Mandir* is kept open for the entire night. Therefore, on the morning of the third day the *kakad aarati* is not performed.

After that, Shri's statue is given a ceremonial bath. Thereafter, *pooja* is performed at His feet (*padya-pooja*).

The holy book (*Shri Sai Sat Charita pothi*), *veena* and Shri's photo are taken in a procession in certain parts of the *Mandir* complex.

After the procession reaches, Dwarkamai, non-stop recitation (*akhand parayan*) of Shri Sai Sat Charita begins.

In the afternoon, chapters from Shri Sai Sat Charita continues in the *Samadhi Mandir*.

Every year, on the day of *Urus* (1st day of Ram *Navami* celebrations) a sack containing wheat is placed in the *Samadhi Mandir* and *pooja* is performed. Thereafter, it is shifted to Dwarkamai - *Masjid*. It takes place of the last year's sack (the contents of which are utilized for *prasadalay*). This practice is being followed over many decades.

On the first day, a well-known *kirtankar* is invited to perform a *kirtan* at about 4.30 p.m. On the second and third day other well-known *kirtankars* perform *kirtans* at about 10.00-10.30 am. Similarly, on the main day of the celebrations, there is a *kirtan* on Ram *Janma*. On the last day of the celebrations, there is a *kirtan* on *kala*.

After the *kala kirtan*, *dahi handi* is ceremoniously broken. This is the last part of the celebrations.

Fireworks, ornamental lighting, flower decorations and showering of flowers from the sky are a part of the annual festivities. Even wrestling competitions are held and the winners are rewarded handsomely.

The Flags of Nimonkar and Rasane Families are taken in a procession led with a musical band.

The Sansthan makes complete provision for drinking water at different places. There are arrangements for the stay of the devotees and even hot water is supplied for their bath. Breakfast, snacks and meals (with sweets) are made available in the *prasadalay*.

The Sansthan tries its best to provide additional amenities and ensures that the devotees can avail of Shri Sai *darshan* with more and more comforts every year.

The pleasing and holy atmosphere of these three days is to be seen and believed.

Centenary Year

The first ever Ram *Janmotsav* was celebrated in Shirdi in the year 1912. And this is its glorious centenary year. This is a unique opportunity for the Sai devotees. I am sure that every Sai devotee would like to be present at the occasion. Not only that, I am also confident that every devotee would do his utmost to make the function a great success and will not shirk responsibility by saying that "the Sansthan is there to take care of such matters."

Before Shri Sai Baba laid down His mortal body, He began certain practices with a view to ensure unity and peaceful coexistence of different religions, castes and communities. The Sansthan has strived to continue those traditions. It has also coped up with the ever increasing number of devotees and their requirements of modern amenities. It has contributed substantially to the development of the Shirdi town and its surrounding areas.

Of course, Baba has blessed the festival of Ram *Janmotsav* with immortality. But, let us also pray to the Almighty that it continues with more and more fervor in all the years to come.

– Mrs. Mugdha Sudhir Divadkar

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Translated from original Marathi into English by **Sudhir**

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Prayer – from Heart for All...

Last year's chain of events like, Best Bakery bomb blast in Pune, the Dhantewada massacre, the Air India Express crash, the gruesome act of sabotage that killed more than hundred people in Jhargram, sent a chill down my spine (the memories of 26/11 in Mumbai had not yet faded) ! So many precious lives lost ! So many hearts aching and bleeding for their near and dear ones, lost forever ! 'Who next ?' my lips quivered. Those whom we see off in the morning, can we be sure that they will be with us in the evening ? I shivered again. I was in front of Baba's photograph in my *pooja* room. "Is there no way out ?" I asked tearfully. Amidst so much pain, insecurity and uncertainty, how can we tread the path of Self-realization, our ultimate goal of life ? The police, the army, the relief-workers and the Heads of states are all doing their bit. But, we, who are at home, young as well as old, in the role of housewives, mothers, sisters and friends (holding no official portfolio), are we absolutely helpless and hapless ? Is there nothing that we can do ? With these thoughts, I was seeing my son off to his college with a short prayer to Baba for his safe journey, to and fro. Unknowingly, my prayers went out for all those boys and girls and then to all the people who must be travelling at that point of time to their various destinations by road, by air or by sea (even a sea voyage is no more safe these days). And suddenly, I realized I had been given the answer – prayer is the way out. Prayers not only for our own folks and for ourselves but for every living



being.

When we pray for our loved ones, let the same prayer go out for as many and as far a land as we can visualize. This I call the Ripple-effect prayer. When we throw a stone in the lake, it creates ripples that seem to slowly cover the entire lake !

When we wake up in the morning, we say a general prayer that, may it be a bright and peaceful day. Then, a more specific prayer for the son who is not being able to do well in studies, or for the old grandmother who is sick and depressed or for the husband who is not happy at work. Let these prayers be extended for all those who are under a similar condition, here or thousands of miles away. Then, while we are seeing our folks off to their place of work, let us pray to Baba to take them as well as every traveller on this planet under His wing of protection. When we are hungry and are

about to have our meal, let us stop and pray that may every living creature, from the tiniest ant to the tallest tree, find sufficient food and be nourished (we can say a short prayer for the old and the sick who have a poor digestion. Yes, it is amazing to discover the wide range of prayers that can be sent out into this Existence). When we are having a cup of tea in the evening, it is not a bad idea to say ‘Cheers’ and pray for the safe return of our dear ones as well as for ____ well, by now, we know who !

While retiring for the day, let us specially pray for those who are sick, injured, depressed, alone or old. Let us pray to Baba that may they have a sound and peaceful sleep so that they may be relieved of their pain and discomfort. Needless to say, our prayers must pour out from the depths of our heart. It is important that after saying the prayer, we must visualize that it has come true. This gives added – power to it to get actualized.

In his book ‘Happier than God’, Neale Donald Walsch says that whatever prayers we say, Nature responds by saying ‘So it be’ (*Tathastu*). So, we should be very careful while wording our prayers. Never to choose negative words or those words that describe the event we do not want to happen. Eg. Instead of praying – “May there be no accident today”, (‘no’ is negative and ‘accident’ is the word that describes the event that we do not want to happen) we should say – “May everyone have a safe and comfortable journey.” So, when Nature says – “*Tathastu*” (So it be), what gets granted is ‘safety’ and ‘comfort’ during the journey. Nature does not register ‘no’ or ‘not’. The best way to counter-act evil is by compassion and understanding. Hence, let us not be judgemental while praying. Let Baba decide who is the evil-doer and who a good samaritan (Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent that He is). We pray for one and all, indiscriminately. This kind of prayerfulness leads us to the awareness that there is no ‘other’ - One consciousness dwells in all living and non-living entities, thereby opening the door to Non-duality. Baba had always emphasized practice over preaching. Let us practice praying to Baba with positive words, specific intent and compassionate heart without being judgemental, for everyone. It won’t be long when each atom of this Existence will be infused with love, compassion and care, thereby resonating peace, harmony and bliss ! Paradise shall be regained ! *Tathastu* !

- Sumona Bagchi

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In continuance of the centenary year celebrations of Ram Navami in Shirdi, a host of programmes were organized from April 11 to April 13 this year.

The inkling of the celebration starts when the palanquins (*Palkhis*) start arriving in Shirdi. This year a sum total of 208 palanquins and about 1, 6500 devotees came from Mumbai, Thane and other parts of Maharashtra, Goa, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, etc. Shree Sai Sansthan had made provision of *mandap*, electricity, water, etc. for the stay of these pilgrims from Mumbai to Shirdi at the following locations - Khardi Golbhan, Kasara Bypass, Latif Wadi, Ghoti, Sinnar, Khopdi, Pangari, Vavi, Pathre, Pohegaon, Dushing Wadi, Maldhon Phata, Jhagde Phata and Nimgaon. For the water being provided round the clock, 10 tankers and 23 workers were employed. Along with that mobile emergency medical team was deployed from Sinnar to Shirdi.

On the first day of the celebration, Monday, April 11 at 4.30 a.m. *Kakad Aarati* was performed. At 5 a.m. Baba's *Pothi*, *Veena* and Photo were taken out in a procession from *Samadhi Mandir* to *Gurusthan* to Dwarkamai. In this procession, Trustees Dr. Eknath Gondkar carried the *Veena*, Shri Ashok Khambekar the *Pothi*, Shri Pandurang Abhang and Shri Krishnachandra Pandey carried the Photo. Trustees Shri Suresh Wable, Shri Shailesh Kute, President of Shirdi *Nagar Panchayat* and Sansthan Trustee Smt. Alka Shejwal, local residents and Sai devotees too participated in the procession joyously shouting Baba's *Jay*.

When the procession reached Dwarkamai, Shri Sai Sat Charita's *Akhand Parayan* (complete reading) was started by Trustee Shri Ashok Khambekar, Sau. Shobhatai Gondkar, Sau. Saraswati Wakchaure, Trustee Dr. Eknath Gondkar and Shri Rahul Shejwal. At 5.20 a.m. *Mangal Snan* (Holy Bath) was given to Sai Baba's Statue. At 6.45 a.m. Sansthan's Vice Chairman Shri Shankarrao Kolhe did *Padya Pooja* (*Pooja* to Baba's Feet).

It is the centenary year of the *Sabha Mandap* of Dwarkamai. Taking this into account, at 6.30 a.m. *Vishnu Yag Yagnya* was initiated by Sansthan's Chairman Shri Jayant Sasane and Vice Chairman Shri Shankarrao Kolhe in the open space in front of Dwarkamai. On the occasion Trustees Shri Pandurang Abhang, Shri Ashok Khambekar, Shri Shailesh Kute, Shri Krishnachandra Pandey, President of Shirdi *Nagar Panchayat* and Sansthan Trustee Smt. Alka Shejwal, local residents and Sai devotees were present.

After the noon *Aarati* at 12.30 p.m. *Tirth-prasad* was distributed. *Hari Bhakta Parayan* (*H. B. P.*) Shri Vikram Nandedkar's melodious *Kirtan* programme was rendered from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. *Dhoop Aarati* was held at 6.30 p.m.

The 'Vividh Geet Gayan' programme by Shri Ninad Shukla was held on the stage in Sai Nagar ground. On behalf of the Sansthan, Trustees Shri Shailesh Kute, Shri Suresh Wabale, Shri Pandurang Abhang and Shri Ashok Khambekar felicitated the artistes, who participated in the programme. After that, at 9 p.m. *Akashvani* (Goa) singer Smt. Shakuntala Bharane's 'Sai Bhajan Sandhya' programme was held on the stage in Sai Nagar ground. On behalf of the Sansthan, Trustee Shri Ashok Khambekar felicitated the participating artistes in the programme. At 9.15 p.m. the *Palkhi* of Shri Sai Baba was taken in a procession around the village accompanied by musicians playing. Alongwith the *Palkhi*, the *lezim* and *bhajan* groups of Shri Sainath Secondary School's girl students, Saileela Digital Brass Band, Shirdi, the cymbals band of Sanmitra Yuvak Mandal, *sawai* and *choughada* musicians and local *bhajan* groups, registered their attendance. After the *Palkhi* entered the temple premises, Shri Subhash Jakhadi, Shri Prakash Bhalerao, Shri Kishore Gagare and Shri Sharad Pathare presented the *bharud* programme in front of the *Palkhi*. On this day, Dwarkamai was kept open throughout the night for the *Parayan*.

Tuesday, April 12 was the main festival day. The *Kakad Aarati* of Shri Sai Baba was done at 4.30 a.m. At 5 a.m. after the completion of *Parayan* of Shri Sai Sat Charita, the *Shobha Yatra* of Baba's Photo, Sacred Book (*Pothi*) and *Veena* was taken from Dwarkamai to *Samadhi Mandir*. Trustees Shri Suresh Wabale carried the *Veena*, Shri Shailesh Kute the *Pothi* and Dr. Eknath Gondkar and Shri Pandurang Abhang carried the Photo and participated in the *Shobha Yatra*. After the *Shobha Yatra* arrived in the *Samadhi Mandir*, Chairman of the Sansthan Shri Jayant Sasane and Trustee Shri Shailesh Kute performed the *Kavadi Pooja* and a procession was taken out. Baba was then given a Holy Bath. After that, Shri Sasane and Shri Kute performed the worship of Baba's Holy Feet. On the occasion of the centenary year of the Ram Navami festival, Sansthan's Trustee and Maharashtra State Minister for Agriculture and Marketing Shri Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil, on behalf of the Sansthan, felicitated the producer of the film 'Shirdi ke Sai Baba' that promoted and spread the work of Baba – Shri Manoj Kumar Goswami, the producer of *Doordarshan* serial 'Sai Baba' Shri Prem Sagar, the actor who played Sai Baba's role in the film 'Shirdi ke Sai Baba' Shri Sudhir Dalvi.

Sansthan's Chairman Shri Jayant Sasane, President of Ahmednagar *Zilla Parishad* Smt. Shalinitai Vikhe Patil, Trustees Shri Suresh Wabale, Shri Pandurang Abhang, Shri Shailesh Kute, Shri Ashok Khambekar, Executive Officer Shri Kishore More and Deputy Executive Officer Dr. Yashwantrao Mane and other dignitaries graced the occasion.

On Ram Navami day, it is a tradition to replace the old sack of wheat with a new sack in Dwarkamai, after performing the ceremonial worship. This year the ceremonial worship of the sack of wheat was performed in the *Samadhi Mandir* by Sansthan's Trustee and Maharashtra State Minister for Agriculture and Marketing Shri Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil and the President of Ahmednagar *Zilla Parishad* Smt. Shalinitai Vikhe Patil and then placed in Dwarkamai. Marking the centenary year of the Dwarkamai *Sabha Mandap*, the ritual worship of the pillar of the *Mandap* was performed by the Trustees Dr. Eknath Gondkar, Shri Pandurang Abhang and Shri Ashok Khambekar. Marking the centenary year of the *Dikshit Wada*, the *Kalash Pooja* at *Dikshit Wada* was performed ritually by Sansthan's Trustee and Maharashtra State Minister for Agriculture and Marketing Shri Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil and the President of Ahmednagar *Zilla Parishad* Smt. Shalinitai Vikhe Patil. Sansthan's Chairman Shri Jayant Sasane, Trustees Shri Suresh Wabale, Shri Shailesh Kute and other dignitaries graced the occasion.

In the morning from 10 a.m. to 12 noon, Ram *Janma* (birth) *Kirtan* was rendered by H. B. P. Shri Vikram Nandedkar on the temple stage in front of the *Samadhi*. The noon *Aarati* was done at 12.30 p.m. Being the centenary year of the Ram Navami festival and the *Sabha Mandap* of Dwarkamai, this year the cradle of Rama's birth was placed in the Dwarkamai hall. For this, the hall was decked with attractive flowers. At 1.30 p.m. the total offerings in the Vishnu *Yag Yagnya* in front of Dwarkamai was completed.

This year too, the annual worship of the *Nishans* (symbols) brought by the Rasane and Nimonkar families were traditionally performed and placed on the *Samadhi*. The procession of the *Nishans* was taken out at 4 p.m. from the *Samadhi Mandir* first to the house of Late Kondaji Sutar's ancestral home in front of Sainath Chhaya building. As per the tradition, the worship of the *Nishans* and *Kathi* (the stick) was done at that place and the procession was taken through the *Palkhi* route and near the tomb of Tajim Khan Baba to Dwarkamai. There the Rasane and Nimonkar families placed the *Nishans* on Dwarkamai. At 5 p.m. the procession of the Chariot was taken through the village and after it returned, the *Dhoop Aarati* was done and *Tirth-prasad* was distributed.

After the procession of the Chariot Saileela Brass Band, Sainath Secondary School's girl students' *lezim* and *bhajan* groups, Sanmitra Yuvak Mandal's cymbal band, local *bhajan mandals*, *sanai* and *choughada* musicians of Shrirampur and others participated in the procession. After the Chariot Procession arrived in the temple premises, the local artistes Shri Kishore Gagare, Shri Sharad Pathare, Shri Subhash Jakhadi, Shri Prakash Bhalerao, Shri Ulhas Walunjkar and others presented the *bharud* programme. After that *Dhoop Aarati* was done.

At 8.30 p.m. the 250 artistes' grand drama 'Shirdi ke Sai Baba' produced by Smt. Asavari Tidke, Sanskar Multi Services of Nagpur was staged on the 5000 sq. feet stage erected in the vast compound of Sainagar. On behalf of the Sansthan, the artistes of this grand drama were felicitated by Sansthan's Chairman Shri Jayant Sasane, Sau. Rajashri Jayant Sasane, Trustees Dr. Eknath Gondkar, Shri Suresh Wabale, Sau. Sindhutai Wabale, Trustee Shri Ashok Khambekar, Sau. Minal Khambekar, former President of Shirdi *Nagar Panchayat* and former Trustee of the Sansthan Shri Kailas Kote, the Deputy President of Shirdi *Nagar Panchayat* Shri Vijay Kote, Councilor Shri Rajendra Kote and Shri Mangesh Tribhuvan. Artistes presented their programmes in front of Sai Baba from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. Being the main day of the festival, the *Samadhi Mandir* was kept open for *Darshan* throughout the night.

On Wednesday, April 13, the concluding day of the festival, after the Holy Bath of Sai Baba, a small *Aarati* 'Shirdi majhe Pandharpur' was sung. After that, worship of the Holy Feet of Baba was done by Trustee Smt. Rimpal Lohia. On this day *Rudrabhishek* was done by Trustees Shri Ashok Khambekar and Smt. Rimple Lohiya at *Gurusthan*. Being the centenary year of Shri Ram Navami festival, *Rudrabhishek* of Sai Baba's *Samadhi* in the *Samadhi Mandir* was done from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. H. B. P. Shri Vikram Nandedkar presented the *Gopal Kala Kirtan*.

At 12 noon the *Dahi Handi* was broken. After that, the noon *Aarati* was done. Trustee Shri Ashok Khambekar felicitated H. B. P. Shri Vikram Nandedkar on behalf of the Sansthan for presenting melodious *Kirtan* programmes on all the three days of the festival.

Dhoop Aarati was done at 6.30 p.m.

At 7 p.m. 'Sai Bhajan Sandhya' programme was presented by Smt. Mita Pandit of Delhi on the stage in Sainagar ground. Trustees Dr. Eknath Gondkar, Shri Suresh Wabale and Shri Ashok Khambekar felicitated the artistes, who participated in this programme. After that, at 9.30 p.m. cine singer Shri Nitin Mukesh presented his 'Vividh Geet Gayan' programme on the stage in Sainagar ground. Artistes participating in this programme were felicitated by Trustees Shri Suresh Wabale, Dr. Eknath Gondkar, Shri Ashok Khambekar and administrative officer Shri Ramesh Sabale. On the occasion of the festival, under the auspices of the Sansthan and the Shirdi villagers a grand wrestling tournament was jointly organized. The first prize winner of the tournament, wrestler Machindra Jape was presented the 'Shri Sai Kesari' title and cash prize of Rs.51,000 on behalf of the Sansthan by Trustees Dr. Eknath Gondkar, Shri Suresh Wabale and Shri Ashok Khambekar. More than 100 wrestlers including female wrestlers participated in the wrestling tournament this year.

Devotees were spellbound viewing the *Mahadwar* (grand gateway) displaying scenes from the life of Shri Sai Baba at the main entrance done by Dwarkamai Mandal of Mumbai. LED screen

was installed on the *Mahadwar*, on which facility to view all the programmes in the *Samadhi Mandir* was provided. The electric lighting done by the Mandal in the *Samadhi Mandir* and the temple premises drew the attention of all devotees. The artistes, who did the decorations were felicitated with a *shawl* and coconut by the Sansthan's Executive Officer Shri Kishore More and Deputy Executive Officer Dr. Yashwantrao Mane. Trustee Smt. Rimpal Lohia donated for the attractive floral decorations of the *Samadhi Mandir* and the premises. TV 9 Maharashtra and Star Majha did live telecast of the festival.

On the first day of the festival *sheera* was included as the sweet dish in the *Prasad* meal, *jalebi* on the second day and *bundi* on the third day. To enable everyone to get the '*motichoor ladoo*', considering the massive turnout, 150 quintals of sugar *ladoo*s were prepared.

On all the three days of the festival, free *Prasad* meal was served in the Sai Prasadalay, from donations made by Shri Naman Ahuja and Shri Narendra Rishi of Delhi, Shri M. Bharat Kumar and Smt. M. V. N. Malleshwari of Vijaywada, Shri R. Annapurna, Shri R. Ramkumar and Shri R. Krishna of Vishakhapatnam, Smt. Jakka Bhaskarrao of Machhalipatnam, Smt. Radha Hirji Thakkar and Shri Shantilal Ambalalal Joshi of Ahmedabad, Shirdi Sai Sevak Mandali Charitable Trust of Kantipur (Orissa), Shri Madhukar Baburao Kalanke of Nasik, Shri Suryaprakash Druvedi and Shri Srivastav Druvedi of Varanasi, Shri Rajendrakumar Garg of Jevara, Kailas Reramic of Gujarat, Sai Properties (Chandigadh), Shri Balasaheb Tukaram Gondkar of Shirdi's Sai Chhaya Group, Shri Devanand Gunjal of Nanded and villagers of Shirdi.

During the three days of the festival, 1,79,706 Sai devotees took the benefit of *Prasad bhojan* and 2,50,389 packets of *ladoo Prasad* were distributed.

Under the guidance of Sansthan's Trustee and Maharashtra State Minister for Agriculture and Marketing Shri Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil, Sansthan's Chairman Shri Jayant Sasane, Vice Chairman Shri Shankarrao Kolhe, all Trustees, Executive Officer Shri Kishore More and Deputy Executive Officer Dr. Yashwantrao Mane, all the administrative officers and employees toiled round the clock for the successful conduct of the festival.

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