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Part 6
Slavery
 by
Mahatma Phule

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Baliraja, Jotiba, Marathas, Khandoba, Malhari, Martanda, Maha Subha Nyayee Bhairoba, Bharadi.

SLAVERY (Under the cloak of Brahmanism)

A CONVERSATION (DIALOGUE),

BETWEEN

JOTIRAO (PHULE)

AND

DHONDIBA (NAMDEV KHUMBAR)

Editor's note -

The names of real gods of dalit bahujans in today's terminology and "shudra ati-shudra" of Phule's terminology are mentioned in this part. After the disappearance of Vedic Gods like Indra, Varun and Agni, the gods like Brahma, Vishnu or Mahesh or the avatars like Rama and Krishna or the more recent deities like Gauri and Ganpati are said to be Hindu gods. None of these were known to masses. Phule has given some of the names prevalent in Maharashtra. These are Jotiba, Khandoba, Bahiroba etc. Recently Kancha Illaiah has mentioned the gods of masses in Andhra in his book "Why I am not a Hindu". As already commented, Phule's name Jotirao is not evolved from Jyoti meaning flame. It is based on a god's name "Jotiba".

-- Dr. K. Jamanadas

Baliraja, Jotiba, Marathas, Khandoba, Malhari, Martanda, Maha Subha

Nyayee Bhairoba, Bharadi. The seven proteges. The practice of `Tali' Sunday observed as a holy day. Waman.

The obsequial rites Vindhyawati. Worship of the earthenware pots.

Death of Baliraja. The practice of `Suttee'. The Aradhis. Shilangana-the rice sacrifices. Prophecy regarding the advent of Baliraja the second. Kojagiri. Death of Waman. The priests' holi. The practice of Veer (hero)

Balipratipada (the new year's day). The second day of the new year (Bhau Beej).

Dhondiba : What, then, did Baliraja do?

Jotirao : He sent express messengers (female camel-riders) to all his noblemen and the various Satraps subordinate to him and commanded all of them to come to his aid forthwith along with their respective armies in his hour of need.

Dhondiba : What was the extent of Bali's Kingdom?

Jotirao : His Kingdom was extensive and was spread over a wide area. It may be conjectured that he controlled some islands round about Ceylon (i.e. in South-Eastern Asia) because one of the island was called `Bali' (in Malaysia). His kingdom included the Konkan to the West of Kolhapur and the adjoining areas (of Mawal) Jotiba was the chieftain of that region. His headquarters were at a hillock Wadi Ratnagiri by name (eight miles to the North-West of Kolhapur). He also ruled over Maharashtra in the South. The inhabitants of this region were called `Maharashtrians' whose corrupted form is `Marathas'. He divided this vast expanse of his kingdom into nine division (khands). The Chieftain of each such division was known as 'Khandoba' He was assisted by one or tow Prime Ministers. Also each Khandoba used to maintain a strong body of wrestlers. That is why he was also know as `Mallu- Khan', The Khandoba of Jejuri (Western Maharashtra) was one of them. He used to quell the rebellious Mallas (Wrestlers) of the neighboring satraps and hence he was called `Malla-ari (i.e. enemy of the Mallas). Malhari is a corrupted from of this title. He used to observe the rules of warfare strictly such as not hitting the retreating warriors on their backs i.e. he always hit them on their front or faces. Hence, he came to be known as `the front (mouth)' i.e. Martand (a corrupted form of `Mar-tond')

He was a friend of the down-trodden. He was fond of music also. He composed a musical symphony (raga) known as `Malhar'. One `Mian' was a famous Muslim singer who composed another symphony (raga) on the pattern of this Malhar (known as Mian Malhar). Baliraja had appointed two other high-ranking officers in Mahrarashtra known as Maha-Subha and Chief Justice of the nine continents to look after the Revenue and Justice (Law) Departments respectively of his vast Kingdom.

There were many subordinate officers under them. The corrupted form of `Maha-Subha' is `Mhasoba'. This Maha-Subha used to undertake a careful survey of the crops and other agricultural operations, and used to keep all the tillers of the land happy and contented, by granting them concessions if and when needed. That is why we find the Maratha farmers installing a stone image of this Maha-Subha in one corner of their farms and covering it with bright vermilion colour. They burn incense in front of him. The devout farmers will not start their agricultural operations such as sowing, reaping or winnowing the corn at harvest time without invoking his blessed name or without burning incense in front of his image. Baliraja's practice of dividing his kingdom into different revenue division (Subhas) may have been imitated by the Mohammedan rulers also, for we have records which prove that not only the Yawans (Muslims) but Egyptian scholars also used to study in Baliraja's Kingdom.

Some areas near Ayodhya and Kashi (Benares) were also part of Baliraja's Kingdom and they constituted the tenth division (Khand) of his kingdom. The Satrap of this region was known as `Bhairoba'(Kal-Bhairi). He seems to have been an inhabitant of Kashi for some time. He was so expert in music that he invented a new symphony (raga) 'Bhairava' by name which was held in high esteem even by such a great musician as Tansen. He also fashioned a new musical instrument `Daur' - which produced such sweet music that it could not be equalled even by Mridanga or Tablaa in point of harmony and sweet tunes. Unfortunately it did not get the publicity it deserved. Bhairoba's devotees were known as `Bharirawadis' (corrupted form `Bharadi'). The Kingdom of Baliraja was more extensive than that of Ajaapaal the father of king Dasharatha or of any other Satrap at time. That is why all of them used to take their cue from Baliraja. Some seven satraps used to pay tributes (monetary taxes) to Baliraja and preferred to remain as his proteges. Hence, they may have come to be called as the `Seven Proteges'. All this goes to prove that Baliraja was a strong and valiant King whose Kingdom extended over a vast area of India. There is a famous saying in Marathi which runs as follows: The palm goes to (is won by) the strong (Bali). (It is the mighty who rules the roost or whose word is command (to others). `Might is right', Literally it means ` Bali twists the ear ! ', Whenever Baliraja wanted to entrust an important mission to some of his noblemen he used to hold full court (Darbar). A bunch of betel leaves and a betel nut along with yellow powder (Bhandara) a coconut would be placed on a ceremonial circular tray. He would then tell his noblemen - He who dares undertake this hazardous mission should come forward and take up the `vida'(betel leaves, betel nut". Then the really valiant noblemen would advance in the court, would loudly chant the celebrated Maratha war cry of `Har Har Mahadeo!' (Victory unto Lord Shiva, - Shankar,-- Mahadeo!), would apply the yellow powder to his forehead, and raising the coconut, the betel-leaves (with the nut) unto his head, would collect the lot in his kerchief reverently.

Foot-Note:

A coconut, a bunch of betel leaves, a betel nut, dried dates, and yellow powder (Bhandaaraa) would be placed in a circular ceremonial tray. It would be kept in front of image of Khandobaa in worship room. The members of the family would then stand around about the tray and touch it gently and all would lift it collectively chanting the name of 'Khandobaa'. This practice was called 'Lifting the Tali' (talee uchalne)

It is quite possible that `Hurrah' was a corrupted form of the war cry `Har-Har'. There is an ancient custom among the English that they express profound joy in sports or battle through the expression `Hurrah! Hurrah!!' Their commanders encourage their soldiers to attack the enemy with the invocation of `Hurrah ! Hurah !!' Their war cry is well known ` - Hurrah Boys ! Lose the saddle or win the horse -.'

The valiant nobleman would then seek the blessings of his lord and master - Baliraja, break up his camp and order his troops to attack the enemy fiercely. The practice of breaking up of his camp preparatory to attacking the enemy may have given rise to the expression `Break up camp and attack the enemy (Tali unchalane). The famous chieftains up Baliraja-namely Bhairoba, Jotiba and (the nine) Khandobas tried their utmost to please their subjects by their beneficent rule. Hence, the Marathas had the practice of lifting up the holy tray (containing the coconut, betel leaves and nut) at the commencement of any holy or auspicious religious function. The rite requires the Marathas to invoke the names of the chieftains Bhairoba, Jotiba or Khandoba as god-heads before lifting the holy tray. Their invocations ran as follows: `Har Har Mahadeo! Glory be to Bhairoba ! or Jotiba ! (literally "May Bhairoba or Jotiba make us prosperous !! " ` Chango bhalo' is a Sindhi expression meaning `May you prosper (May Sadanand (Shiva) triumph and May Mallukhan prevail' (Here the term `Ahankar'- `self-respect', 'ego' may be taken to mean his continued supremacy). Baliraja along with his subjects used to observe Sunday as a holy day, being scared to the divine god-head Mahadeo (Shankar). That is shy the present day Marathas which term includes the Maharas and the Mangs, the farmers (Kunbis) and gardeners (Malis) etc. worship Lord Shankar - their family-deity after due ablutions and holy offerings, be it simple dry bread. They do not take even a drop of water before performing the holy rite.

Dhondiba : Having arrived at the outskirts of Baliraja's Kingdom along with his troops, what did Waman do then?

Jotirao : He made inroads into Baliraja's Kingdom along with his troops, persecuted his subjects in various ways and approached his capital (city). Baliraja, therefore, was forced to meet this challenge (i.e. of fighting with Waman) with his limited private army even before the troops of his various satraps had joined his personal army. Baliraja's troops used to fight Waman's troops every day throughout the second fortnight of Bhadrpad, cease fighting at sundown and return to camp at night for sorely needed rest and recuperation. It was, therefore, easy to remember the days on which troops from both the sides sacrificed their lives (i.e. the second fortnight of the

month of Bhadrapad). This may be the rationale behind the present practice of observing a general or Collective death anniversary of the brave soldiers who died on the battlefield during that fortnight. This practice is known as `Paksha' or `Mahaal fortnight'.

So deeply engrossed was Balirajaa in fighting with Waaman during the first eight days of Ashwin that he could not retire to his palace for nocturnal rest even. Baliraja's queen Vindyawati order her eunuchs and other servants to dig a pit and to stock it with fuel wood. The Queen squatted by this pit, abjuring food or drink for eight days and nights, placing an earthenware pot filled with water, and all the while fervently praying to Lord Shiva (Mahadev) for the victory of her husband-Baliraja-over the (evil) Waman. On the eighth day of the bright fortnight of Ashwin the shattering news of the defeat and death of King Baliraja reached her, at which the Queen set fire to the fuel wood in the pit and embraced death by jumping into the fire in the practice of 'Suttee' (self- immolation by a window on the funeral pyre of her husband). When the Queen's personal retainers and attendant ladies saw their Queen perish in the fire, they tore off their clothes, burnt them, beat their breasts and lamented loud and long for their dear-departed Queen, round about that pit. `Oh Kind-hearted Queen, your virtues and reputation will forever reverberate on this earth'. The cruel Vipra and others converted this funeral pit into a 'sacrificial fire pit' so that tragic event be not remembered for long and they may have written down many fictions in their spurious religious books about it

When the survivors of Banasura's army went home on the tenth night of Ashwin, their women-folk knew in their heart that a second Baliraja was destined to appear on the scene and would surely usher in a heavenly reign of peace and prosperity on earth, stood in their doorways and greeted them in the auspicious manner, waving a tray containing two lighted lamps round the men's faces for their prosperity and uttering these words- `May ill evil (the rule of the Dwijas-Waman) be banished from hence and `may Bali's Kingdom Come! '` This practice has continued uninterrupted for centuries among the subjects of Baliraja. The Kshyatriya women-folk of Bali's Kingdom wave the auspicious lamps about the heads of their husbands and sons on the tenth night of Ashwin (Dassera) and pray fervently to God for the advent of the second Baliraja's Kingdom (May Bali's Kingdom come!). This gives us an idea of the nobility of the second Baliraja. Blessed be that Baliraja and blessed be his subjects' loyalty Contrast against this the practice of the modern orthodox Hindus (Brahmins) who eulogise the Queen (Victoria) on her birthday in fulsome terms and pray for her continued prosperity, always with the covert expectation that by this show of loyalty they may be able to get a few crumbs (from the imperial tables) in the form of suitable jobs, promotions and decorations, and contradict this `show' of loyalty in their personal discourse and in newspaper articles.

Dhondiba : Did 't the noblemen of Baliraja come to this rescue in response to his

command?

Jotirao : Yes, they did, When his noblemen and their satraps along with the troops joined Banasura's troops on the fourteenth day of the bright fortnight of Ashwin, the Vipras in Bali's Kingdom were frightened and fled to Waman for dear life'. So terrified was Waaman at this turn of events, that he collected all his 'Vipra' brethren and conferred with them how best to save themselves from Banasura's troops. He began to propitiate his family deity for his success on the full moon night of Ashwin by keeping an all-night vigil.

He then collected all his troops and their women-folk, marched to the borders of his demense (Kingdom) and awaited patiently (the troops of) Banasuras. Some people call this as "Kujagiri - or Kojariri" (Pournima).

Dhondiba : What did Banasura do then?

Jotirao : Banasura attacked Waman suddenly, vanquished him and footed all his wealth from him. He harried all his troops and drove them away to the Himalayas. He then camped at the foot (hills) of the Himalayas, cut off the supply of food- grains to him, with the result that most of Waman's troops died of starvation. Thus came to an end the career of Waman i.e. Waman breathed his last. The followers of Banasura greatly rejoiced at this event. They regarded Waman as a great `Upadhi' (dignitary) which vanished with the end of Waman. From then on, the Vipras began to be called as Upadhya's. The Upadhyas collected together all their dead in the battle field and burnt them on a collective funeral pyre known as `Holi'. It seems they had a hoary custom of cremating their dead.

So also Banasura along with all his Kshatriya troops celebrated the heroic sacrifice of their (heroes) compatriots by donning the apparel of Veers, brandishing naked swords on the first day of the dark fortnight of the month of Falgun. It was a hoary practice among the Kshatriyas to bury their dead.

After the death of Baliraja on the battle-field (his henchman) Banasura put up a fierce fight against Waman for one full day, but he had to run away with the remnant of his army on the ninth day of Ashwin. So elated and intoxicated was Waman with his victory! Realising that there were no men- folk in Baliraja's capital then, he entered Baliraja's capital city along with victorious army on the tenth day of Ashwin and despoiled the city of all its gold (golden ornaments). The present practice of cutting the leaves of the Shami tree (as golden leaves) and exchanging them with our neighbours known as the distributing the gold of the `Dassera' on the tenth day of Ashwin may have its origin in this event. Waman then went back to his own territory.

As Waman was about to enter his personal residence, his wife had fashioned an image of Bali in wheat dough jocularly, and placing it on the threshold of the house, she said

to Waman, 'Look, dear lord, your foe Bali has come here again to fight with you'. Waman kicked the dough image of Bali contemptuously and entered his house. This practice is followed by Vipra ladies even to this day. On the tenth day of Ashwin-known as Dassera or Vijaya Dashami, Vipra ladies fashion a rice or wheat dough image of Bali and place their foot on the chest of Bali, pierce his stomach with a tender bough of the Shami tree, and then enter their homes. this practice is found among many Vipras.

Banasura stationed some of his troops at the foot-hills of the Himalayas to stand guard against the Upadhyas troops besieged therein and returned to his capital along with his Chief nobleman. To describe the festivities they celebrated in honour of their victory would be a very lengthy process: so we give below a brief resume of them. He made a careful inventory (record) of all the wealth and booty (obtained from the enemy in the battle) and worshipped it ceremoniously on the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight of Ashwin. On the fourteenth day of the new moon night (Amavasya) of Ashwin, he gave a grand banquet to all his noblemen to celebrate the victory. On the first day of the bright fortnight of Kartik (Known as Bali-pratipada or the new year's day) he gave handsome gifts of money to his noblemen, befitting their ranks and ordered them to resume their respective stations in their districts. All the women-folk were delighted at this auspicious event that they feasted their brothers, they waved the sacred tray bearing two burning lamps round their brothers' faces, chanted the sacred incantation of 'May all evil flee far from hence, and may Baliraja's Kingdom come! By this the women reminded their brothers of the auspicious advent of the second Baliraja. From that day till today we find the Kshatriyas' daughters honouring their brothers in the above mentioned manner on the second day of the bright fortnight of the month of Kartik (popularly called Bhau Bheej), the second day on which the brother honours his sister and vice versa) and remind them and bless them with the advent of the second Baliraja. Such a custom is not found among the Upadhyas.

Dhondiba : So then (We are told that) Adi-narayan incarnated himself as Waman to banish Baliraja in the form of a pygmy beggar and hoodwinked him by asking him the gift of only three steps (of the earth). He then abandoned his beggar's pygmy form, assumed a gargantuan form, and having occupied the entire earth and the sky with his two steps, posed a problem before Baliraja as to where he should now put his third step. The ever generous Baliraja having become quite helpless now, told the gargantuan form to rest his third step on his head. At this the gleeful wicked gargantuan form banished Baliraja to the nether world by resting his foot on his head. Thus was the stratagem fulfilled. All this (fiction) has been described by the Upadhyas in their fictitious books of Scriptures like 'Bhagwat' etc.,. Your narration conclusively proves that all this is rank fiction and bull-shit. So what do you have to say the whole thing now?

otirao : Now just reflect for a brief while. When that gargantuan form occupied the entire earth and sky with his two steps, it stands to reason to suppose that whole villages many have been crushed under his first step. How did Baliraja escape unhurt is a mystery to us. It is not stated therein that Baliraja was lifted gently up and placed on the giant's feet. Secondly, when the gigantic form placed his second step in the sky many stars and galaxies must have dashed against one another and, hence, must have been crushed. Thirdly, if he occupied the sky with his second step, where did he rest his torso? A person can raise his foot only upto his navel at best. So his trunk (torso) may have reached the utmost limit of the sky. He could have fulfilled the contract by putting his own head. But he chose instead to put it on Baliraj's head (a sheer treacherous deed!) and pressed him down to the nether world. (How do you explain this).

Dhondiba : The gigantic form claimed himself to be the incarnation of Adi-Narayan. How dared he indulge in such rank treachery? File on those Bhat composers of the spurious scriptures who term this giant as an incarnation of Adi-Narayan! Their own compositions prove that Waman was very mean, cunning, treacherous and ungrateful because he condemned his benefactor unto the nether world.

Jotirao : Fourthly, when the giant's head may have pierced the sky and ascended into the very heavens. he may have been forced to ask in a loud tone from there of Baliraja - 'As the earth and the sky were occupied by my two steps, where could I place my third step?' (to complete his original deceptive contract). A vast distance must have separated the gigantic forms' face in the sky and Baliraja on the terrestrial earth. How is it that not single Russian or Frenchman or Englishman or American could not hear even a single word of his conversation? Furthermore, Baliraja is reported to have told Waman to put his thin step on his head (on the earth). How could Waman have heard this answer? Because Baliraja had not become such an extraordinary being as Waman had become. Fifthly, how was the earth not pressed down into the nethermost regions under the huge weight of the gargantuan form? All this is passing strange!

Dhondiba : It is a miracle that we are spared to witness the mundane events of today. On what must that gigantic form have subsisted? Where could the four pall bearers have been found to carry his corpse to the cremation ground (cemetery)? Where could they have procured such a vast quantity of wood or cow-dung cakes to cremate his huge corpse? If enough fuel-wood was not readily available for his cremation, then perhaps stray dogs and jackals may have feasted off his corpse. As all these doubts which have arisen in our minds are not satisfactorily resolved, we are constrained to conclude that these original fictions (legends) may have been the basis of the spurious scriptures which the Bhats composed later on (to dupe us all).

Jotirao : If you read the `Bhagwat' carefully, Dhondiba, you will conclude that

Aesop's Fables' are much better (are far more credible) than the `Bhagwat' (of the Bhats).

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