

36. Gadge Maharaj



Gadgebaba was a modern saint. He lived many years ago but he is still remembered for the great work he did in thousands of places.



What did he look like? Silver hair, brown eyes, fair skin. Big, tall and stout body. He wrapped a lungi around the waist and wore a torn but clean shirt. A cloth shoe adorned one foot while the other foot was many times bare. He always carried a bowl and a stick. Because of this bowl or a 'gadde', people started calling him Gadde Baba or Gadde Maharaj. His real name was Debuji Zhingraji Janorkar.

He never stayed long in one place. He slept only on a rough blanket and used only his own arm as a pillow. He roamed from village to village spreading his message of cleanliness, humanity and the importance of education. He was not bothered by hunger or thirst. What he liked was bhajan, keertan and teaching people. Thousands of people flocked to listen to his keertan.

His keertans used to be very lively. He would not simply give lectures. He would often put questions to the audience to keep up their interest. Then he would show them how absurd they were in their words and actions. For example, he would ask:

- How many gods are there?
- One.
- You worship Khandoba, Mhasoba, Viroba and Vetāl and so on. You worship many more, don't you?
- Yes!
- Your actions show that you believe that there are a number of gods. And yet you said a little while ago that you worship one God. Were you asleep then?

The audience would be taken by surprise. Then they would listen more attentively to the Baba. Baba would say,

- You offer things to God in return for His favour, don't you?
- Yes, we do.
- And don't you say, God, my child is ill. Please make him well. I'll offer you a goat.
- Yes, we do.
- And don't you say that if God lets go the two-legged child, you will offer him in return a four-legged animal?
- We do.
- Why? Can God who created this world be so cruel? Can He be so greedy? Can He be bribed?
- No!
- Do you think killing and eating one of the God's creatures will please him? Will He bless you for that?

Then the audience would realize how wrong their thinking was. They would promise to be more thoughtful.

After the keertan, people flocked to touch Gadge Baba's feet. But he wouldn't allow anyone to do that. He didn't like people touching his feet. As soon as the keertan was over, he sped away, leaving the crowds far behind. "Develop good qualities. That's all. There's no point in touching my feet," he said.

Baba followed one rule to the end of his life. Wherever he went, be it a village, town or small settlement, he asked for sturdy brooms, spades and pans. Then he would sweep and clean the whole area. Soon, other people joined him, but he did not wait for that to happen. He started sweeping and cleaning the place himself. And if any bystander tried to bow to Baba while he was busy in this work, that person would get a smack of the broom on the back.

"You don't do any of this work yourself. And when somebody else tries to do it, you put yourself in the way! Move aside! See how nice and welcoming this village looks when it is clean!"

If you visit a holy place in Maharashtra like Pandharpur or Nashik or Dehu or Alandi, you will see the work Gadge Baba did in these places. He himself worked hard, asked for help and built free boarding places, ghats on the rivers, and water spouts. For the poor, helpless, disabled and the needy, he started places that offered food free of cost. He built schools, colleges and hostels for children. He saw God in the poor and miserable people. Serving these people was his way of serving God!

- **adorned** : decorated with. ● **bare** : without any covering.
- **humanity** : kindness or consideration for others. ● **flocked** : gathered, came together. ● **audience** : people who gather to listen to something.
- **sped away** : went away speedily. ● **sturdy** : strong.
- **bystander** : person standing near but not taking part in what is happening.

Things to do :

1. Answer the following questions in a few lines.
 - (a) What did Gadge Baba look like?
 - (b) Why did people call him Gadge Baba?
 - (c) What message did Gadge Baba spread?
 - (d) Why did Gadge Baba speed away after the keertan?
 - (e) Wherever he went, what did Gadge Baba do?
 - (f) What was Gadge Baba's way of serving God?
2. List the different ways in which you can help to keep your home and school clean.

