

SREE SAI SAMARTHA SATCHARITA

I bow to Sree Ganesh

I bow to Sree Saraswati

I bow to Sree Sadguru

The Guru is Brahma

The Guru is Vishnu

The Guru is Maheshwar

The Guru is Parabrahman made manifest

Obeisance to that Sree Guru.

I bow to Him the Sadguru, who is the Embodiment of the Bliss of Brahman, the Bestower of the Greatest Beatitude, the Absolute, the Personification of Pure Knowledge, who is Beyond Duality (the pairs of opposites like pleasure and pain), All-Pervasive like the sky; to whom ‘Thou Art That’ and similar scriptural passages allude to – The One without another like Him, the Eternal, the Pure, the Immovable, the Witness of all Thoughts and Abiding ever beyond all Modifications (of mind and body) and Attributes (of the three *Gunas*).

FOREWORD

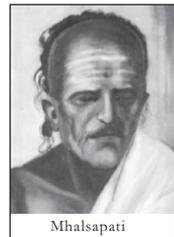
Sree Sainath *Maharaj* came for the first time to Shirdi approximately fifty years ago¹. This village of Shirdi is in Kopergaon Taluka^{1A}, of Ahmednagar District. There is no authentic information about who His mother and father were, or the place from where He originally hailed. It is, however, certainly evident that Maharaj had considerable connection with the Moghuls. In Maharaj’s speech, there were frequent references to the towns under Moghul rule such as Selu, Jalna, Manvad, Pathri, Parbhani, Navrangabad, Beed and Bidar. Once, a man from Pathri had come for Maharaj’s *darshan*. Maharaj asked him about the news from Pathri and named many important persons there, inquiring about their welfare. From this, it can be concluded that Maharaj had detailed knowledge about Pathri; but it cannot be said with any certainty that He was born there.

Similarly, whether Maharaj was born a Brahmin or a Muslim, cannot be said with any certainty. Moreover, many of His devotees believed that He was not born of any womb. This also cannot be substantiated. Those, who are not His devotees may find it far-fetched to say that He was not born of any womb; but this author does not feel so. Maharaj Himself had spoken

to this author that “now I leave and then appear as an eight-year old”. When Sree Krishna manifested to mother Devaki, He was also eight years old. Thus it is described in the *Puranas*. “Unimaginable was the Light, that shed from the eight year form, which illumined all the ten directions and before whom the sun and moon paled into insignificance”. (Harivijay – Chapter 3 – verse 126). Many of Maharaj’s devotees do not believe that He had become a *Siddha*, by *sadbhanas*, but He was definitely an *Avatar*; and seeing Maharaj’s *leelas* and incredible powers considered Him to be an *Avatar* of Sree Krishna. Maharaj Himself did not attribute any of these powers to Himself. When He spoke, He called himself God’s ‘Servitor’ and ‘Devotee’. “I have abundant blessings of my Guru and by His Grace the difficulties of the devotees are removed and they are benefited”, thus He said. When He blessed the devotees, generally His words were : “Allah will look after your well-being”. He never attributed any greatness to Himself. He never said : ‘Anal Haque’, which means that ‘I am God’; but His words on and oft were ‘Yade Haque’ which means ‘I am remembering God’.

When Maharaj came to Shirdi, He came with the marriage procession, along with a *Muslim* gentleman. His name was Chandbhai. He was the headman (Patil) of Dhoopkheda village. One day as his horse was missing, he was walking in its search. Then, under, a tree he saw Maharaj sitting. He had never before seen Maharaj. Maharaj called him and said to him : “Take a puff from the *chillum*² and then proceed”. He replied: “My horse is missing and I have set out in its search”. Maharaj said: “Why go far for that? It is just across and beyond that fence there”. Accordingly, Chandbhai went towards that fence as directed by Maharaj. The horse was really grazing there. Chandbhai took the horse and came near Maharaj. After smoking the *chillum* given by Maharaj, he pressed Maharaj to come to his home. Maharaj said: “I will come tomorrow”. Maharaj, accordingly, went to his home the next day. Where Chandbhai had been given a smoke from the *chillum*, in the woods, there was no burning coal. Maharaj had struck the tongs, in His hands, on the earth and produced a burning coal to serve His own purpose.

Maharaj stayed at Chandbhai’s home for some days. Later, the nephew of Chandbhai’s wife got betrothed to a girl from Shirdi; and Maharaj came to Shirdi, in that wedding procession. The marriage party had alighted at the pounding grounds, near Khandoba’s³ temple, outside the village. When Maharaj went to the Khandoba temple, He met a man called Mhalsapati there. This Mhalsapati was a resident of Shirdi and a goldsmith. As he was a devotee of



Khandoba, he was the authorised regular visitor of Khanderaya⁴, since many generations. When Maharaj went to the Khandoba temple His dress comprised of a *kafni*⁵, a cap and a *dhoti*⁶. As soon as Mhalsapati saw Him, he welcomed Him with the *words*: “Welcome Sai Baba”, and that name viz. “Sai Baba” was adopted by Maharaj till the end. Most of the devotees of Maharaj called Him “Sai Baba” or just “Baba”. On one occasion, when Maharaj had to give testimony before the Commissioner,⁷ and He was then asked His name, He had replied: “They call me Sai Baba”. Mhalsapati brought Maharaj into the village and introduced Him to his friends Kashiram Shimpi and Appa Jagale. These three usually served, according to their capacity, the *sadhus*, saints, *gosavis*⁸, *fakirs* and ascetics visiting the village, and graciously took care of them, as Shirdi was so located that there was considerable movement of such people or groups. Such groups came often and the above-mentioned three persons gave them respectful treatment as per their capacity. All these three (Kashiram, Appa and Mhalsapati) became complete devotees of Maharaj. Out of these, Kashiram and Appa died after some years. Kashiram died first and some years later Appa passed away. But, both of them, were fortunate to die on *Ekadashi* Day⁹. It is appropriate that the devotees of God should die on His special day – and, in that way, the death occurred of both of them. Kashiram served Maharaj in the best possible manner, that is truly with *tana, mana and dhana*¹⁰. Earlier, Maharaj’s *kafni* used to be saffron coloured or white. Kashiram stitched a green *kafni* and a green cap for Maharaj; but, generally Maharaj wore a white *kafni* and tied a *dhoti* round His head. Similarly, he supplied Maharaj with tobacco for His *chillum*, fuel for His *dhuni*¹¹, and if need be, also money – this was what Kashiram undertook upon himself to do. Later on, he would place his bag of money before Maharaj and humbly request Him to take as much as he wished. Maharaj was not used to taking *dakshina*¹² in those days; even then He took a pice or two from Kashiram. Kashiram was so keen for Maharaj to take *dakshina* from him that if on some odd day Maharaj failed to take the *dakshina*, then he would feel very bad and tears would spring to his eyes. To feel bad thus, also hinders the spiritual progress, because it presupposes an egoistic attitude of having the capacity to give. Naturally, it is the Lord’s usual aim to remove all impediments in the devotees’ spiritual progress. Thus, it happened in the case of Kashiram. After some time, he experienced shortage of money and Maharaj commenced asking for *dakshina* from him, repeatedly. He had to acknowledge that he had no money left. Then “Ask the grocer for a loan and give it to Me”: so said Maharaj. Accordingly, for some time, the practice of asking the grocer and bringing it, continued. Later, the grocer also refused to give. Virtually, this sport was to remove Kashiram’s ego. He realised that he did not have the capacity to give; and

as soon as this dawned on him, his financial position improved and he was comfortable again, as in the past. He also no longer had the intense desire that Maharaj should always take *dakshina* from him.

Kashiram was a dealer in textiles; and, he travelled to different villages and set up shop there on market days. Once, whilst returning from Naura, on market day, he came across some Bhil robbers. Kashiram was on horse back. They did not go to him first; but they intercepted the carriages that were going alongside him. Later, when they spied Kashiram, they ran across to him. The robbers prepared to loot Kashiram; and, in fact took some of his belongings also. Kashiram did not offer any resistance. Later, those robbers laid their hands on the small bundle he had with him. The robbers believed that there were some valuables in it. In reality there was only fine, soft sugar in it. Kashiram had been advised by Jankidas Baba, a *Satpurush* so named, to feed ants regularly with sugar; therefore Kashiram usually kept sugar with him. Hence this bundle was very precious to him and he decided that come whatsoever he would not part with this bundle. At that moment the sword of one of the robbers was noticed lying around by Kashiram. He picked it up and killed two of the robbers. A third robber came from behind, at that time and gave him a blow on his head with a pick-axe. Thereupon, Kashiram became unconscious and fell down like a corpse. The remaining thieves, believing that Kashiram was dead, abandoned him there and left. As a matter of fact, he was not dead. After some time he gained consciousness and became well after some days. As he had complete faith in Maharaj, he refused to be admitted to a hospital and earnestly requested: "Take me only to Shirdi". Accordingly, he was brought there and as per Maharaj's instructions, he was given medication by Madhavrao Deshpande. In effect, by Maharaj's grace, Kashiram's health improved and he became fit.

The Government of Bombay awarded Kashiram with a sword, on account of this brave deed. While Kashiram was scuffling with the robbers, here in Shirdi, Maharaj created a commotion. Continuous stream of abuses, shouts and similar agitations started. Those near Him, from among the devotees, immediately realised that some bhakta, dear to Him, was facing some grave calamity; and all this commotion was only to protect the devotee and this was found to be true. The thieves were numerous and well-armed. No one could have believed that Kashiram would escape alive from their resounding blows and violence but who can harm when there is a saviour! May that be whatsoever. Kashiram survived after this, for several years, and passed away on *Ekadashi* the 11th day of *Chaitra Shudha, Shaka* 1830 (1908).

Out of the three above-mentioned persons, Mhalsapati was quite long

lived, and he passed away in *Bhadrapad Shaka* 1844 (1922). Maharaj and he had a very close relationship. Maharaj used to sit in the *Masjid*¹³; and sleep on alternate nights in the *Masjid* and the *Chavadi*¹⁴. When Maharaj slept in the *Masjid*, Mhalsapati sat up near Maharaj, on those nights, till daybreak; and intermittently both of them spoke very lovingly to one another. Until his death, Mhalsapati carried on the practice of sitting up the whole night in the *Masjid*. As he was completely without expectations, though he was influential, Maharaj's devotees usually received good advice and happiness. In short, after the death of Maharaj, he was the abode of repose for the devotees.

Since Maharaj came here, He generally stayed in the *Masjid*. That *Masjid* was greatly dilapidated. During the day, Maharaj wandered here and there but at night He stayed in the *Masjid*. If anyone took Him for a meal He would go; He gave medical advice or medicines to the sick. He never accepted any money for this. Not only that, but if the ill and diseased were not well attended, then He would Himself attend on them. And such persons who were prescribed medicines by Maharaj or who were personally attended by Maharaj exist even today in large numbers. Later on, Maharaj stopped giving any medicines and started to give only *udi*¹⁵ or the sacred ashes and people were cured by that.

“Earlier, I used to give medicines to people”, Maharaj had once mentioned to this writer himself. He said, “Kaka (he used to call this writer ‘Kaka’), I used to give medicines to people earlier. Later, I left off giving medicines and started chanting ‘Hari, Hari’ and as I continued the chant of ‘Hari, Hari’, I got self-realisation (met Hari)”.

When Maharaj came here first, there was a *sadbu* here named Devidas at that time; and different *sadbhus* came to him at varying times. Similarly, this was the route for those doing pilgrimages on foot to Rameshwar, Pandharpur and other pilgrim centres in the south and therefore many virtuous persons came here from time to time. Amongst them, was a *sadbu* named Jankidas who was here for a fairly long time. It is said that he was a person of excellent authority (in spiritual matters). Maharaj and he had many confabulations. The famous Gangagir Baba also used to come here. When Gangagir came for the first time here, after Maharaj had arrived, then Maharaj was carrying two earthen pots in His two hands, filled with water from the well. On seeing Him, Gangagir Baba immediately told the village folk present, “When did this person come here? He is a pure gem. He has great worthiness. It is the great good fortune of the village that you have acquired this gem”. Then Gangagir Baba went for Maharaj's *darshan*¹⁶ and they both talked, with great love, with each other. Anandnath

Maharaj of Akkalkot had spoken in the same vein about Maharaj. This Anandnath Maharaj was the disciple of the famous Akkalkot Swami. Once when he had gone to Savargaon, near Yeola, Madhavrao Balwant Deshpande, Dagadu Bhau Gayake, Nandram Shivram Marwadi and Bhagchand Marwadi, all of Shirdi, had gone for his *darshan*. After the *darshan*, this group set out to return to Shirdi, when Anandnath Maharaj suddenly came running and sat in their cart, saying : “I will come with you”. The people from Nevargaon and Yeola made efforts to dissuade him, but in vain. When Anandnath Maharaj came here, he spoke these words in respect of Maharaj: “This is a diamond. You do not know its worth. Even if it is on a dunghill, it is a diamond”. At that time, Maharaj had not attained fame and the village folk believed Him to be an ordinary person, in fact, a mad *fakir*.

Maharaj’s state at this point of time was – “Wearing torn and tattered (clothes); sitting wherever it pleased; appearing as a crazy madcap! But absorbed in *Brahman*”. Sometimes, Maharaj would go and sit at the stream; sometimes underneath a particular margosa tree near the village wall; sometimes in somebody’s farm; the clothes on His body were tattered; on and off He put on a ferocious appearance. He appeared to the ordinary persons as mad, because of these and similar modes of behaviour. But soon, the people’s erroneous misconception was removed and the people of Shirdi realised the worth of Maharaj. It happened thus:-

Maharaj had a great desire to light many lamps in the *Masjid* as well as in the temples. In reality, to say ‘a great desire’ is to put it in common parlance. Really speaking, none of His actions were meant to fulfil any great desire (because, He had no desires left to fulfil). But they had a different purpose, namely the welfare of the people. May it be whatsoever. For these lamps, Maharaj used to go to the shops of the oil vendors and grocers to ask for oil and bring it. For some time, they gave oil to Maharaj. Of course, for how long would these practical persons give oil? One day they told Him that there was no oil. Was that going to bring any change in Maharaj’s daily routine? Maharaj poured water instead of oil in the earthen lamps, and placed the wicks, as usual, struck a match and lit them. When Maharaj had thus set about the matter, the people were convinced about His madness; but when the lamps lit up, by the striking of the matches, and kept burning the whole night, then the people were astonished. They went to Maharaj and submitted themselves requesting His pardon for treating him scornfully. So many had harrassed Maharaj in different ways, little by little. They also got very frightened. But Maharaj was full of compassion; Maharaj’s creed was to oblige even those who had offended Him and even disregarding their injury to Him. Therefore, really speaking, no one had

cause to fear. As Maharaj loved all the people, He cared for them as if they were His own children. Whenever the village was to face any distress, Maharaj advised them ahead of time, and those who acted as He said remained fearless.

Though the whole village believed in Maharaj, yet very few people had close contact with Him. As Maharaj's tendencies were to be sharp and blunt no one dared to become unnecessarily familiar with Him; and toing and froing by the people in the *Masjid* was very limited. At this time, Madhavrao Balwant, from the Deshpande family, began to frequently visit. There was a small house near the compound of the *Masjid*, where a Marathi school was housed, at that time. Madhavrao was a teacher in that school; and he began the practice of frequently going from the school to the *Masjid*. When he went there, he would fill the *chillum* and himself puff at it and also give it to Maharaj to puff. Whatever be the reason, Madhavrao began to become familiar with Maharaj and Maharaj attracted Madhavrao. After some years, Madhavrao left off all occupations and took to only serving Maharaj and the devotees who came for His *darshan*. In lieu of this service, Madhavrao did not even ask for any compensation. Till this date, the devotees of Maharaj and he have close contacts. And many devotees received great support from him; and a number of devotees, more or less, took no step without consulting Madhavrao.



Generally Maharaj did not leave Shirdi to go elsewhere. Sometimes he used to go to Nimgaon¹⁷ to visit Babasaheb Dengle, who was Maharaj's devotee; and, at times to Rahata¹⁷, where there was Chandrabhan Sheth, Marwadi. After the death of Chandrabhan Sheth, Kushalchand Sheth looked after the grocery business. Maharaj often called for this Kushalchandji and if any who hailed from Rahata came, He would inquire after Kushalchand. Let that be now.

Babasaheb Dengle's brother Nanasaheb Dengle lived at Jali – Nimgaon. He had no son so he married again; but even that was useless. Then Babasaheb sent him for Maharaj's *darshan*. When Nanasaheb Dengle came for Maharaj's *darshan*, then Maharaj blessed him (so) that he would have a son; and in course of time the blessing bore fruit and he got a son. Nanasaheb developed faith, therefore, in Maharaj and he began to come frequently to Maharaj. Since he had a lot of contact with Government officials he naturally praised Maharaj before the officials; and consequently Shri Chidambar Keshav alias Annasaheb Gadgil, who was the *Chitnis* of the Collector came soon for Maharaj's

darshan along with a sizeable group of persons. Day by day Annasaheb Gadgil's faith in Maharaj increased and he became a total devotee of Maharaj.

Nanasaheb Denge brought for Maharaj a thick plank of wood to sleep on, as the *Masjid* in which Maharaj lived and slept was in such a completely dilapidated state that the floor was very dusty and there was a possibility of dirt falling even from the top. His objective was that Maharaj should put the plank down on the floor and sleep on it, instead of on the bare floor. Maharaj did use the plank to sleep on, but in a different way. Instead of placing that plank on the floor, it was hung, with the help of old rags to the beam of the *Masjid*, and He began to sleep on it. If one saw the rags, they were not in a condition to bear even the weight of the plank but with Maharaj's superhuman powers they not only bore the weight of the plank but also the weight of Maharaj's body. At the time of going to sleep Maharaj placed four burning small earthen lamps in the four corners. Everyone found it a great marvel to see Maharaj on that plank and a large crowd stood to watch this marvel from afar; but none did see Maharaj climbing onto that plank or descending from it. Often the crowd took turns to keep a watch to observe Maharaj climbing on and descending but no one saw that. A large crowd used to gather to see this marvel. Therefore, to avoid this harassment, Maharaj broke the plank one day.

Gopalrao Gund, Circle Inspector (Revenue) of Kopergaon also came for *darshan* for the same reason as Nanasaheb Denge had originally come. He had three wives but no son. He also got a son with Maharaj's blessings. He also became a total devotee. One day it occurred to him that since the *Masjid* was dilapidated, it should be reconstructed; and for that purpose he collected a lot of stones. But Maharaj did not grant him permission to build the *Masjid*. That work was to be done by another devotee. But that account is given later. The stones collected by Gopal Rao were appropriated by Maharaj's orders to build the Shani temple there and for the renovation of other village temples. Maharaj paid attention to the condition of all the temples. The Maruti temple here was also got renovated by Maharaj and even expanded. Just as He paid attention to the temples of the village, He also paid equal attention to the tombs. As Maharaj sometimes sat under the margosa tree on the boundary of the village, this matter has been mentioned herein above. "There is a tomb of a *Pir* there", Maharaj said once; and when the place was dug, there a tomb was truly found. Then on the same day, the devotees took out a procession of Maharaj with musical instruments and shouting of slogans. Maharaj had made a reference to this tomb even to the undersigned (present) author. Maharaj said: "This is my father's place. Burn incense here, every Thursday and Friday for your

own welfare”. Once Gopal Rao Gund thought of holding an annual fete or *urus* here. He placed this idea before Taty Patil, Dada Kote Patil, Madhavrao Deshpande and other devotees in the village and with their approval, he took upon himself the arrangements for it. But the *Kulkarani* at that time took objection and the result was that the Collector gave orders not to hold the fair. But the proposal to hold the fair had Maharaj’s full blessings. Therefore, the above mentioned devotees once again requested the Collector, got the first order cancelled and obtained the order to hold the fair. It was decided to hold the fair on *Rammavami* with Maharaj’s consent, and since then till to-day, it is held at every *Rammavami*.

Tatya Ganpati Kote Patil looked after all the arrangements and management of this fair at Shirdi, right from the beginning. Maharaj loved him dearly. He called Maharaj as maternal uncle. His mother, *Saubhagyavati* Bayjabai served Maharaj devotedly. And that too, at such a time when the majority of the common folk in the village counted Maharaj amongst the mad men. In the earlier days, Maharaj used to go four or five times into the village for alms. But *Saubhagyavati* Bayjabai never ever turned him back. Naturally the lady received the fruits of her devotion; but her whole family and specially Tatya was the beneficiary. Not only did Maharaj give money to Tatya but he was indulged in every way. When Tatya went every evening to Maharaj, the loving occasion between the uncle and the nephew was worth watching and their loving discussions were worth listening to. Similarly, all arrangements at the *Masjid* and the *Chavadi* were in Tatya’s hands. Maharaj did not get up till Tatya came and helped Him up; and it was Tatya who held Him by the arm and took Maharaj, to the *asan*¹⁸ spread out by Him, on which Maharaj would take a seat. This was the routine. Even the *chillum* was filled by Tatya.



Tatya G. Kote Patil

At the time of the *Rammavami* festival, that is on *Rammavami* day itself, a procession of two big flags is taken with pomp to the *Masjid*; and there, these two flags are tied to two ends. Out of these, one of the flags comes from Shankar Rao Raghunath Deshpande alias Nanasahab Nimonkar, and the second one from Nagar’s Damu Seth Kasar. Nanasahab Nimonkar was the *Deshpande* of Nimon (the District Accountant). Nimon village is in Sangamner *Taluka*. As Nanasahab was counted as a leading personality amongst the men of the *Taluka*, the Government had appointed him as an Honorary Magistrate; and he discontinued this assignment at the end because of old age. His uncle resided here, therefore he sometimes came here. Whenever

Nanasahab
Nimonkar

he came here he went for Maharaj's *darsban* at the instance of his uncle. By and by, his faith in Maharaj increased and his last three years he spent in Maharaj's continuous service. He went to his home only for a bath, morning and evening prayer rituals, and his usual ritualistic practices; the rest of the time he was at the beck and call of Maharaj. Though he was past sixty, he did not think of resting or avoiding any service to Maharaj; nor did he have any wish for it. Maharaj called him *Kaka*. He did not survive long after Maharaj. Soon thereafter, he attained Maharaj's feet. By Maharaj's grace the end came very well. In the last three days, he saw Maharaj everywhere, and whoever came near him, he addressed as Saibaba. (It has already been mentioned earlier that Maharaj was called Baba). Even his own wife he addressed as : "Come Saibaba". The wife felt he was under some delusion so she said: "I am not Baba, I am your wife". Whereupon he said: "Who is in you? Baba only. You are Baba". Thus, with continuous remembrance of Maharaj, his end came.

The second flag that comes at *Rammavami* time is from Damodar Savlaram alias Damu Seth Kasar – that is already been mentioned above. Though he had two wives, he had no sons by either; therefore he remained quite grieved about it. It was suggested to him once, by Govindrao Sapkar, the father-in-law of Madhavrao Deshpande, to come here and take Maharaj's blessings. Accordingly, he came. Maharaj blessed him and he got a son by His blessings. Naturally, his faith in Maharaj was established; and since then bringing a new flag at *Rammavami* and feeding all the *fakir's* gathered there on that day has been followed by him; and this observance is continued to this day.

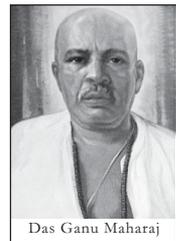
Some years before the commencement of the *Rammavami* festival, Maharaj had drawn towards him a selfless devotee. That devotee is Narayan Govinda alias Nanasahab Chandorkar. Though he was a resident of Kalyan, he was the *chitnis*¹⁹ of the Collector of Ahmednagar. He was told one day by the *Kulkarni* of this place viz. by Keshav Anant, alias Appa, that Maharaj had sent for him. At first Nanasahab did not believe Appa and told him : "Why do you take Maharaj's name in vain? If you desire something from me, why not speak plainly?" There upon, Appa maintained that he was truly called upon by Maharaj. Thus when he was told so with certainty, Nanasahab came for Maharaj's *darsban* and soon had faith in Maharaj. Then he came frequently and began to take the opportunity of receiving the nectar of Maharaj's wisdom. Maharaj and he remained together for hours at a time. "Making *sashtanga*²⁰ *namaskar*, questioning the guru, serving him, learn what *jñyana* is. Then those *jñyanis* who have attained the real knowledge



Nanasahab
Chandorkar

of the *sad-vastu* will give you *upadesha* of *jñyana*'. As per this quotation, from Sri Bhagvad, Nanasaheb's obeisance, questioning and service was there and Maharaj gave him *upadesha* (instructions). On one occasion Maharaj propounded the full meaning of this very *shloka* for more than an hour. From this preaching, Nanasaheb was convinced that Maharaj had perfect knowledge of Sanskrit. Nanasaheb served Maharaj to his utmost. He will be always remembered for two special matters by the devotees. One was for breaking, renovating and expanding the old *Masjid* of Maharaj. As it was not convenient for Nanasaheb to do this work personally, it was Nanasaheb Nimonkar who stayed there himself, at his request, and undertook to supervise the work and completed it with excellence. Maharaj's consent to build the *Masjid* was taken through Mhalsapati, and Maharaj agreed to it. Nevertheless, while the work was progressing, Maharaj used to break down the structure from time to time and huge and heavy stones and pillars were thrown afar. Then, that work had to be re-done. Others may find Maharaj's actions as strange, but those who know the inner meaning would not be surprised at Maharaj's actions. At last the *Masjid*'s work was completed; and Maharaj having gone that day to Nimgaon, was brought back with pomp and ceremony to live in the new *Masjid*. *Sutars* (carpenters) Kondaji, Gabaji and Tukaram, three brothers, were of great help in the work of the *Masjid*. Until Maharaj's passing away, sweeping the *Masjid*, cleaning the utensils of Maharaj, heating the water for Maharaj to wash His face and then drying the place – all these jobs were done by Tukaram only. Generally, Maharaj did not allow anyone else to do this work. Even today, the flags for the *Ramnavami* are prepared at this carpenter's home and the procession starts from there.

Nanasaheb's second major service was to publicise Maharaj's fame and let people have the benefit of Maharaj's blessings. As he had been a *Mamlatdar* and later, a Deputy Collector, earlier on he had to go on a lot of tours. Nanasaheb was also responsible even for the benefit of a *darshan* of Maharaj for the undersigned author. Thousands of persons from Bombay and Thane District took the benefit of Maharaj's *darshan* and were filled with joy. Nanasaheb was responsible for that. Two other persons besides Nanasaheb, were responsible for drawing and attracting the people from Bombay. One of them was Ganesh Dattatreya Sahasrabudhe alias Das Ganu. He used to work in the Police Department earlier. He was very engrossed with *tamasha*²¹. He came for Maharaj's *darshan* due to Nanasaheb; and slowly, slowly Maharaj had such an effect on his mind that he left his job and began the work of publicising the story of the saint through *kirtans*²² and books.



Das Ganu Maharaj

He continues this work even to-day. He has authored 'Bhakta Leelamrut', 'Sant Kathamrut', 'Bhaktisaramrut' relating to the lives of saints; besides he has commented in simple and beautiful Marathi on the 'Isavasyo Upanishad' and Sree Dñyaneshwar Maharaj's 'Amrutanubhava'. Besides these, he is the author of several other books. By bringing him from Bombay, Nanasaheb Chandorkar provided the residents of Bombay with *keirtans* full of the nectar of *bhakti* and through them the pleasure of hearing about Maharaj's attributes and nature. Thanks to his *keirtans*, large crowds from Bombay and places close to Bombay became keen to take Maharaj's *darshan* and also went for the *darshan*. The second person mentioned above, was the undersigned author himself. By his staying at Maharaj's feet, at this time, for long spells naturally withdrawing from the social activities, he got publicity as having become a 'Baba', (that is a *sanyasi* or *vairagi*) in Parsi and other newspapers, and therefore, considerable number of persons came for *darshan* of Him who was instrumental in effecting this transformation. From 1910 approximately, the numbers coming for Maharaj's *darshan* began to increase substantially.

When Nanasaheb Chandorkar came here, there was not a single *wada*²³ to stay for the people, who came for *darshan*. But Maharaj remedied this deficiency very shortly. Rao Bahadur Hari Vinayak Sathe was the Deputy Collector of the *Zilla*. A long time had passed since the death of his first wife. But he had no desire to remarry. As he had no son, his circle of friends was urging him to remarry. Later, it was decided that he would take Maharaj's *darshan* and act according to his wishes. Accordingly he came for *darshan*. Maharaj told him to remarry and also blessed him with the boon of a son. Rao Bahadur selected a girl and asked her father Ganesh Damodar Kelkar to present her to Maharaj. Accordingly when that girl came there, Maharaj filled her sari *pallu*²⁴ with a watermelon and applied *kumkum* to her forehead. Later, at the proper time, the marriage took place and soon thereafter, as suggested by Maharaj, he purchased the land surrounding the margosa tree, already described earlier and built a *wada* there. Thereby, the people coming for *darshan* had residential facilities. Later after three years, Maharaj got a *wada* built by the undersigned and thereafter got a *wada* built by the Nagpur millionaire Gopalrao alias Bapusaheb Buty. This *wada* is huge and being built of stone is strong and it cost a lot of money. It appears that there is no comparable building in Shirdi or in the nearby vicinity or *taluka*. Maharaj's *samadhi* is in this *wada*.

Soon, Shirdi took on the trappings of a *samsthan*²⁵. *Aratis*²⁶ were done of Maharaj and, at the time of the *arati*, whisks, parasols and other insignia of royalty were used. When Maharaj went to the *Chavadi* musical instruments, horse, *palkhi*²⁷, *chopdar*²⁸, singers of *bhajans*²⁹, flags and banners and all

such paraphernalia accompanied him. The *Chavadi* was decorated with mirrors, lamps, chandeliers and photographs. The *Masjid's* and the *Chavadi's* floorings were laid with tiles etc. All the credit for this goes to Sundarabai Kshirsagar alias Radhakrishna Ayi. It would not be out of place to say that she was the guru of loving *bhakti*. She did not have wealth, but surrendering her body and mind to Maharaj, she had obtained from different devotees of Maharaj different items and thus well established the Shirdi Samsthan. By ill luck her life ended early, that is when she was only 35. She was here only for 8 to 9 years. But in that short time she achieved what perhaps might have taken another 25 years or more. It was due to this lady, that Maharaj's night *aratis* and the *Kakad aratis* in the early morning hours started in the *Chavadi*. Maharaj did not even allow His *puja*³⁰ in the earlier times. The first *puja* was allowed to be done by Mhalsapati. After quite a while, Nimgaon's Sitaram Denge came to do *puja* but Maharaj got angry with him, allowing His *puja* in the end. Some time later, Nanasaheb Chandorkar's younger son Mahadev alias Babu was allowed to do *puja* satisfactorily, and thereafter, all got general permission to do *puja*. But at that time Maharaj did not allow his *aratis* to be done. After some time, the privilege of doing the first *arati* was received by Tatyasaheb Noolkar. Being the Civil Judge at Pandharpur, he had become ill and came here on leave; with the desire that he should leave his job and spend the rest of his life at Maharaj's feet; and in the end, that is what happened.



Radhakrishna Ayi served in all possible ways. Twice in the day, she swept and cleared the path on which Maharaj walked. Consequently, she herself removed all the dirt there. Before her, this work had been started by Balaji Patil Nevaskar. That devotee, free from worldly attachment, had left all the worldly ties and had come here to live. Many people came to dissuade him and take him back but he did not leave. He swept the route and smeared the *Masjid* with cow-dung. He took Maharaj's *darshan* from afar. He did not go close to him. He drank only the water of the washings of Maharaj's feet, or the water which had been used for Maharaj's bath (water which had fallen on His body) or the water which Maharaj had partially drunk. Similarly, he would place before Maharaj the harvest from his fields and take only what Maharaj would give him. Usually, Maharaj of course returned everything. After living there for two years, Maharaj gave Balaji Patil leave to go to his home and accordingly, he left. Nevertheless, he came frequently for *darshan* and offered his harvest to Maharaj. After some years he passed away.

Not only did Radhakrishna Ayi render all kinds of services to Maharaj, but

got several of Maharaj's devotees to do all kinds of services. She did various kinds of chores; and got all involved in them; and the devotees did the work with love and eagerness. Men of all status, and also women, were included in that. To carry away earth and stones, sweeping roads, making mud and carrying it, digging trenches and filling them, splitting wood, dusting lamps and chandeliers, washing and painting the *Masjid*, making flowers from paper, holding whisks, peacock feather fans, ornamental umbrellas, flags, stitching flags – all these were done by people of higher status and even ladies coming from noble families, were pleased to have got the opportunity to render service.

Maharaj's routine was practised with great regularity. He woke early in the morning and sat near the *dhuni*; a little while later, He performed His purificatory rites and evacuation of bowels etc. which He cleared off with His own hands. Then, He would sit quietly for a while. During that time, Bhagoji Shinde, a person by that name, would remove the bandages on Maharaj's right arm and massage the whole body also. Then, he would fill the *chillum*, light it and give it to Maharaj to smoke and after Maharaj smoked it, He would give it again to Bhagoji to smoke. This would happen for five or six times and then Bhagoji would leave. This Bhagoji was stricken with leprosy but Maharaj never took objection to service by him; nor did He change His routine which involved him even by a jot. After Bhagoji left, Maharaj would remain seated for a while and at that time, some regular devotees came and rendered services; and afterwards, Maharaj would get up to wash His face. The way Maharaj washed His face was worth watching. He poured as much water as He desired on His arms, feet, face, ears and cleaned all these parts with great delicacy³¹.



As Sree Eknath Maharaj has described: "All the hair on the body was scrubbed. But the body was not massaged for that purpose. Thus He was not bringing in any distinction between any creature and himself, which may otherwise cause injury".

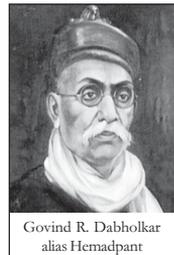
This was also the way in which the bath took place. After the face was washed, He went into the village for alms. He went to five fixed places for alms and stood at a fixed spot. He would receive *bhakeri*³² or dry preparations as given and eat a little bit, on His return to the *Masjid*. He would remain in one place for a while after eating. At that time, a large crowd of the devotees gathered and Maharaj would impart knowledge in the form of stories (parables). Sometimes, during the sitting, Maharaj would purchase bananas, guavas and mangoes and distribute to the crowd and even fed them with His own hands. When I say 'fed with His own hands', I mean that Maharaj

would peel the bananas, He would cut the guavas into pieces Himself and also the mangoes were pummeled and given by Him (to suck). After this sitting, Maharaj would go to the *Lendi* and would remain there generally for one hour. From the time of His return from the *Lendi* till 2 O'clock in the afternoon, He would remain in the *Masjid*. During that time, the devotees performed Maharaj's *puja*, worship, *arati* etc. Then after Maharaj's lunch, He would go again to the *Lendi*; He would return from there after three fourths of an hour approximately and would remain in the *Masjid* till evening. He would step out just a little in the evening and return immediately and stay in the *Masjid*. Normally, there would be three sittings during the day. One in the morning after breakfast, second on return from the *Lendi* and the third around five in the evening. During all the three sittings, Maharaj would impart knowledge in story form. Maharaj's words would clear the different problems and doubts of the different persons gathered there and they would get solutions for the different matters concerning them. Maharaj did not speak on deep *Vedantic* issues openly nor did He give lectures on the *Upanishads*. His teachings were essentially relating to good conduct. To cleanse the disciple's mind and then to sow the seeds of knowledge in it, is the *shastric* way of the *Sadguru*; and thus Maharaj acted; therefore His teachings were relating to morals and ethics. But instead of the open verbal teachings, one received from Maharaj priceless and several scholarly examples and experiences and therefore, those devotees who came with full faith to Maharaj, received the highest benefit.

Out of the devotees coming to Maharaj, the large majority were those who came with desires and wishes to fulfil, but Maharaj fulfilled their desires and turned their minds towards their greater welfare without they being aware of it. Maharaj had taken *avatar*³³ for the welfare of the people and He looked after the welfare of all. There is not an iota of doubt about that. His *leelas* and his attributes cannot be correctly described.

“God has infinite attributes. He who behaves child-like can be compared to God. Just as one cannot count the particles on the earth, no matter how much time one spends, similarly one cannot adequately describe the powers of such a One”!

Yet the collection of Maharaj's *leelas* to the extent possible will be for the benefit of all. I believe this implicitly. Such a collection has been done by my revered friend Govind Raghunath alias Annasaheb Dabholkar and a large part of it has been done by him in ovi metre. This work in ovi metre was begun when Maharaj was in body with his specific permission and upto to-day thirty-five chapters are ready.



Govind R. Dabholkar
alias Hemadpant

The book has turned out to be loving and heart-rending and it is not in doubt that it will be found most useful by Maharaj's devotees and even other readers. The ovis herein being modelled on Eknath Maharaj's ovis, one recalls Nathmaharaj frequently when reading the work. In short, this work is the fruit of Sree Sainath Maharaj's *Prasad*³⁴ and this is experienced at every step.

Finally, I end the Foreword with a prayer to Maharaj that "May His devotees and other readers be filled with bliss and acquire knowledge from this work and may their faith in Maharaj grow further".

One of Baba's Children
Hari Sitaram Dikshit.

Notes:

1. From this statement it would appear that the author wrote this Foreword in 1908 approximately. But, this cannot be, as Dabholkar began keeping records only after that date. There is some apparent error in dating this foreword by at least twenty years.
- 1A. Now Shirdi is in Rahata *Taluka*.
2. The part of a hubble-bubble which contains the fire and tobacco is placed in it.
3. Another incarnation of Shiva.
4. Deity of Jejuri, who is also Khandoba.
5. Long, ankle-length shirt-like robe.
6. Garment worn by males around the waist, passing under the crotch and tucked behind.
7. In the matter of a case of theft of jewels.
8. Wandering ascetic, who used to wear clothes of ochre colour.
9. Eleventh day after the new moon and the full dark night.
10. Total surrender of body, mind and wealth signifying that all identifications and attachments of the ego must fall.
11. Sacred fire, burning perennially lit by Baba.
12. Offering made to a Guru or holy person, which could be monetary or otherwise.
13. Present day Dwarakamayi.
14. Meeting place of the villagers and the office of the *Kulkarni*.
15. The ashes from Baba's *dhuni* having miraculous and healing powers.
16. Divine vision or audience with a great saint.
17. Two neighbouring places, close to Shirdi, not farther than three to five kilometres.
18. Seat of a honoured person, like a sage or a king or a dignitary.
19. The Record Keeper of village revenue records.

20. Falling on the ground as a stick, with the eight limbs of one's body touching the ground. It designates total surrender.
21. A melodramatic entertainment of the lewd variety.
22. Religious discourse interspersed with music and song.
23. Stately or large edifice – a mansion.
24. The end of the *sari* with ornamental border.
25. Institution.
26. Worship with the waving of the lamp.
27. Palanquin.
28. Mace bearer.
29. Devotional Songs.
30. Worship as per specific ritual.
31. Similar to the ritual of Muslims before doing the *Namaz*.
32. Thick flat unleavened bread used by village folks.
33. Manifestation on earth by a divine being.
34. Favour or anything given by a Guru as a blessing.



Hari Sitaram Dikshit alias Kakasaheb Dikshit
writer of the 'Foreword to the first Marathi Edition'.