

Pioneer of Clean India: Sant Gadge Maharaj

Pavan kumar Vishwakarma*

The person who is clear with his vision and whose goal of life was serve the nation through his various social welfare activities like: cleanliness, social reforming, medicated to poor and sacrifice his life to the countrymen. That was the personality known as Sant Gadge Maharaj or Gadge Baba.

Debuji Zhingraji janorkar, popularly known as Sant Gadge Maharaj or Gadge Baba. He was born in 1876 in Shedgaon village of a washerman family in Amravati in North Eastern Maharashtra. Sant Gadge Maharaj was a mendicant Sant and social reformer from the Indian state of Maharashtra. He lived in voluntary poverty and wandered to different villages promoting Social justice and initiating reforms, specially related to sanitation. He is still revered by the common people in India and remains a source of inspiration for various political parties and non - government organizations. He was one of the greatest modern-day social reformers in India, worked for and among the poorest of the poor, with the childhood of simple Indian villager became pioneer of *Swachh Bharat*. He travelled from one place to another with the symbol of his aim, broom in hand and piece of earthly pots on head. When Gadge Maharaj entered in any village, he instantly started to clean roads and gutters of the village, especially the streets of 'untouchables quarters' singing songs intermingled with his signature slogan 'Gopala! Gopala! Devkinandan Gopala!' (*Gopal is another name of Lord Krishna*).

People would join him and very soon the village would wear a clean look. Thereafter, usually after a common contributory meal that people of all castes and communities ate together, he would gather the villagers for an interactive session of two or three hours at night. When he cleans the villages, Villagers gave him money as a symbol of gratitude, he used this money for establishment of educational societies, Dharmasala,

hospitals and animal Shelters. He educate people against evil practices of society and superstitions.

“Cleanliness is Godliness,” He would Retort when some people mocked him for mixing bhajans with broom work. Sant Gadge Maharaj shows the actual path of cleanliness to mass but the cleanliness campaign achieved “ what laws could not achieve for years; reduced epidemics and water related disease; keep away with many social taboos; encourage women to come out from the confines of their houses and strengthen the community spirit among the villagers. His visions are very clear towards the mission of his life; make clean our surroundings and keep away from disease or health issues. He cures his people and done efforts for that no one will be hunger and thirsty in his community or society, he also arranged the shelter for needy and poods. He laid special emphasis on hygien – he always kept a broom with him as a symbol of cleanliness. He would say, “Instead of offering fragrant flowers to idols of Gods, off your blood for service of the people around you. If you feed a hungry man , your life will become meaningful. Even my broom is better than those flowers. But probably you will not be able to understand this.”

Sant Gadge Maharaj was an illiterate scholar who studied in the ‘University of life’ was a preacher par excellence. Thereafter, usually after a common contributory meal that people of all castes and communities ate together. He would gather his kirtan had a mesmerizing, and also belief shattering effect on the audience. For all, he would boldly challenged religious orthodoxy and peoples entrenched beliefs and behavioral modes on what constituted cleanliness and impurity, morality and immorality, faith and blind faith. He is at his unorthodox best in his last kirtan delivered in Mumbai on November 8, 1956, just a month before his death. (it is available at [youtube.com/ watch?v= 9N5V6 eBizw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9N5V6eBizw)).

Baba who was born into the caste of washerman (Parit) questioned discrimination on the basis of castes and gender. ‘ if God is the father of all human beings and if he is kind and all loving, how can he be unkind towards some castes and kind towards other? he would ask. Selfless and compassionate service of those in need is the highest form of religion, he preached. God does not resides in temples, Masjid, idols and places of pilgrimage.

He resides in the dwelling of the poor and the grief stricken. Free of all meta-physical debates about God, his simple message delivered in the culturally rich native language of the common people, was that “Dharma

*Research Scholar, Deptt. Of Sociology, BHU, Varanasi

means food for hungry, water for thirsty, clothing for naked people, shelter for homeless, care for sick people, education for the children of the poor, love, protection and affection for animal and birds, hope for those in despair.” above all his insisted, Dharma means dissolution of the ego, a pre-condition experiencing the divinity in humanity.

Sant Gadge Maharaj was also awakening the society through his message and speeches, which was more useful to the all section of society like; farmer, poor and working class and also for marginalised society. He built numerous dharamshalas, goshalas, schools and hostels for poor students and homes for destitute children in different parts of Maharashtra.

Gadge Maharaj fiercely attacked greed, corruption, exploitation through money lending, alcoholism, Superstitions, animal sacrifice as a religious right and other personal and social ills. Ridiculing Godmen who claim to perform miracles, he would say, “Man himself is a great miracle; injustice in society is also a miracle. How is it that the farmer, who harvests gold in the form of food from the land has to starve? This indeed, is the strongest miracle.

Sant Gadge Maharaj has the holistic ideal of cleanliness; he propagated physical, ethical, spiritual and social reformist’s dimensions.

In this, he had much in common with Mahatma Gandhi. Like; Gandhiji, he treated patients of Leprosy dreaded and stigmatize disease those days. He greatly respected the Mahatma describing him in his *kirtan* as a *Devdoot* (an imagery of God) and respect was mutual.

There is one another thing that Baba Gadge was also respected by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. They met several times once, in 1949, Ambedkar who was India’s Law Minister, then came to know that Baba was unwell in Mumbai. He rushed to see him, and Baba told him that why did you take the trouble of coming? Your each minute is precious. I am just a *Fakir*. You are the one occupying a position of high authority.” Ambedkar’s reply is significant, “my authority as a minister, Baba, it is short lived. Once the Minister ship goes, the person has no authority, your authority as sants are everlasting.” It is not for nothing that the common people in India reverentially describe sants as Maharaj. thus is more popularly known as Sant Gadge Maharaj. It is the unique greatness of Indian Culture that the words *Baba* and *Fakir* are regarded as synonyms with king, one who continues to rule over the hearts of common people long after he is dead. Writing about the relationship Ambedkar and Gadge Baba, Prof. Vivek kumar says , “Today’s Dalit

leaders should take a lesson from him, especially the modern leaders educated in the universities and colleges who look down on social activists, reformist missionaries and Dalit workers who are devoid of bookish knowledge. How many of them have as many academic degrees as Ambedkar had. Babasaheb discussed with Gadge Baba movement and issues related to social change, even though he was both a scholar and powerful politician. We have realized that working on the ground and being a scholar are two different things. And co- ordination between the two is crucial for the success of any social reform movement.

To sustain the fervour of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and convert it Into a successful social force, we should seek inspiration from the lives of India’s Venerated and most beloved Sant reformers like Gadge Maharaj. Prime Minister Narendra Modi should popularize and project them as the icon of “Swachh Bharat Abhiyan” and not celebrity brand ambassadors, many of them men and women of straw who hanker after fame and for Fortune and leave no transformative influence on people. Also following the footsteps of Sant Gadge and Mahatma Gandhi, the Prime Minister should expand the scope of Swachh Bharat to mean not only cleaning streets but also clean hearts, clean Minds, clean Institutions, clean politics and clean governance. After all many ills in our society, including the lack of outer cleanliness are due to the growing lack of inner cleanliness. Sant Gadge Maharaj was a complete institution in own self, he was not only a great sant but the greatest social reformer of his time. Dr Ambedkar had described him as the greatest social servant of the people after Jyotiba Phule. Like most of our sants, Gadge Baba had no formal education, he learnt to read and write on his own efforts. It was probably due to the influence of Ambedkar that he laid great emphasis on education so much, so that, he used to say that even if it comes at the cost of the peoples in which one eats food; one should not hesitate in getting an education. “You can always eat your hands but without education life is incomplete.” He used to cite the example of Ambedkar, while urging the people to get educated. “Look how, Dr Ambedkar becomes such a learned Man by dint of sheer hardwork. Education is not the monopoly of any castes, the son of poor man can also obtain any degrees.” Sant Gadge maharaj was the messiah of the marginalized section of society, he always promote the weaker section for being educate and trying to achieve their goals of life by which, the weaker section could improve their livelihood. Baba

Gadge had strong feeling to eradicate the condition of poor section and helped them for their betterment.

Sant Gadge Maharaj was the real well wisher of mankind, whatever done by him in form of Swachh Bharat that is amazing task. Baba ji always favor cleanliness activities like cleaning the villages and streets. He also discusses his ideas in favor of cleanliness of mind, cleanliness of hearts and also cleanliness false ideas and own self clear vision and thoughts. Gadge Maharaj was the first Sant who just thought like this, for swachh Bharat. he established the first bricks of *Sweachhta* in India, which results can be seen at this time in 21st century. The clean India campaign laid by Sant Gadge Maharaj in 19th century, which is still in its ongoing form, the dream of Baba Gadge is being true rapidly. The government of Maharashtra has taken great initiatives of Baba Gadge's ideas of cleanliness, which is really very useful to the state government and as well as central government also. Baba Gadge founded more than 100 institutions, including 31 educational institutions. Later, the government formed a trust to preserve these institutions.

Today, Sant Gadge Maharaj may not be physically with us but his teaching and preaching are still relevant and prior to Indian society. We need to draw inspiration from them. He is a beacon not only for Maharashtra but also for the every corner of the country as a whole. On May 1st, 1983 the Maharashtra government established Sant Gadge Maharaj University in Amravati as a taken honored to him. On December 20, 1998 his 42nd death anniversary the Government of India issued a 'Postal Stamp' to commemorate him. In 2001 Maharashtra Government launched "Sant Gadge Baba Gram Swachhta Abhiyan."

Eventually, it seems that Sant Gadge Maharaj was a real hero of the nation who internally serves the society through his great work and aware the people for being educated and making clean their surroundings. We respect from deep of our heart and salute such a highly reverend and great personality.

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