

CHAPTER III

Das Ganu Maharaj

After Nana Chandorkar, the logical, chronological, and the appropriate name to deal with is that of Ganpat Rao Dattatreya Sahasrabuddhe, popularly known as Das Ganu Maharaj. His importance for the Sai movement consists in the fact that the rapid spread of Baba's name in Maharashtra was due very largely to his

efforts. Baba fully well foresaw or ordained it. In 1890 Das Ganu was a Constable and play actor of village plays of an obscene character. Baba drew him to himself for the double purpose of improving his (Ganus) own spiritual condition and thereafter rendering signal service to the public for the spread of Sai faith. When first he came to Shirdi, he came as the "orderly" of (i.e. constable attending on) Nana Saheb Chandorkar, and whenever Chandorkar visited Shirdi, Ganpat Rao followed him as his Constable, not at all out of faith in, or love for, Sai, but because the master compelled him to—very much like the Harijans (to whom Nandanar preached the value of Siva's nama japa) who said (Alas! perforce we have to say, SIVA, SIVA). For a very long time, Das Ganu could not appreciate Baba. Up to the end, he could not realise Baba as really Deva i.e. God or as his Guru-Deva, though he had high regard for him and his powers and wrote or sang of him with poetic skill describing Baba as *Ramaavara* i.e. God, doing lip service. That was why he went to one Islampurkar, a Brahmin Guru, to get his initiation long after he met and dealt with Baba (a step which Baba naturally did not object to when D. G. reported the fact to Baba). Anyhow Baba made a remarkable change in the personality of Das Ganu, and Das Ganu also realised how powerful Baba's influence on him was.

It has been mostly an unwilling submission on the part of Das Ganu to Sai Baba's yoke. At his earliest advent to Shirdi, Baba noted the nature of Ganpat Rao, and determined that his nature, calling and work should all be totally changed. His nature then was just that of a Police Constable who had hardly any education, but who was very clever in composing Lavani metre songs in Mahratti impromptu and in taking a female's part in lewd village dramas. He would put on female dress and dance about in the village and take great pleasure in that achievement. His great ambition was to rise in his profession. The Police Department by itself was not a particularly moral department, and for one who was ambitious to rise in it, one's regard for truth, righteousness, fair dealing, etc. would practically be nil, and scruples, conscience, and character were unwanted hindrances to efficiency. Knowing all their dangers and the real dormant capacity of the man, Baba, from the very beginning, told Das Ganu to give up both his

attachments, namely, (1) attachment to the village dance and drama and (2) attachment to the police profession. Chandorkar also pressed this upon Ganpat Rao. With great difficulty Ganpat Rao was weaned away from drama. But as for the profession, he would not give it up. The charm of holding the position of Sub Inspector (Foujdar) and lording it over people was too powerful for him to resist. When Baba said, 'Ganu, you had better give up your police service', Das Ganu replied, 'Baba, let me become a Sub Inspector (for which position I have passed the departmental examination) and hold the appointment for only one year, and thereafter, I will give it up'. Baba replied that he was not going to get the Sub Inspectorship, and that He would see to it that he did not get it. So, Baba's work was to bring in difficulty after difficulty, pressure after pressure to bear upon Ganpat Rao; and Ganpat Rao had innumerable difficulties even without Baba adding to them.

For instance, he was fond of touring to distant places of pilgrimage outside his official limits, and he would go without taking the permission of his superiors, which would not be easily granted. On one such occasion, he had gone to a shrine in the "Nizam's State" and was returning. His fellow constables were highly envious of him, and they wanted to pluck his feathers. So, when he was returning to his place, and when he was still on the Nizam's side of the river Godavari, the envious constables were on the other side watching to catch him. He noted this fact and felt that he would surely be dismissed. So, he took up the Godavari water in both of his palms and swore by that "Ganga" water, (as it is called) "Baba, let me escape this time I shall certainly give up my police service". Then he went back into the Nizam's State just a short distance, when lo! and behold, there was proof of Baba's Grace! A village Munsif came to him and told him that certain dacoits were dividing their booty secretly and all that the Village Munsif wanted was a police gentleman with authority to arrest them. So Ganpat Rao went, seized the dacoits and the booty, and proudly returned to his own station on the other side of the Godavari. When questioned how he went out without permission, his reply was that he had gone there for the seizure of dacoits and property—no doubt a falsehood. Thus he not only escaped

punishment, but he thought he had a very good chance of rising in his profession. With that thought uppermost in his mind, he was riding past Shirdi to go somewhere. Just as his horse came to Shirdi, and when he did not want to alight there but to pass on without seeing Baba, Baba was on the road and made him alight. Then Baba asked, 'Arre, who is it that swore with a palmful of water in his hand, man?' Then Das Ganu's unabashed reply was, 'What of that? Baba, I am going to resign after all, after I get the Fouzdarship'. Baba said that he would see to it that he resigned, and added 'Until a peg is driven into you, (i.e. pressure becomes painful), you will not obey'.

Das Ganu thought there was no further pressure. But pressure came. He along with three other Constables was told off to the duty of capturing a notorious dacoit, who was a terror to the whole countryside, and whose organisation was so vast and wonderful that even the Police Department was in his pay, that is, several of the Police Department were in his pay and he could checkmate their movements. Das Ganu went off to Lonivarni, a place which that famous dacoit, Khana Bhil by name, was visiting. But Khana Bhil was a man of extraordinary abilities. He had shot the other three persons nominated along with Ganpat Rao to catch him, and was determined to deal with Ganpat Rao in the same way. Ganpat Rao disguising himself as a Ramdasi was making use of the village children, learnt from them details about the visits of these robbers, and communicated their movements to the police head-quarters. Suddenly one day Khana Bhil turned up, seized Ganpat Rao by his neck, and said, 'You fellow, you are going to catch me! Do you know that it is Khana Bhil that has now caught you? Now I am going to shoot you, as I have already shot your three companions.' Ganpat Rao was in terror. He was close to Sri Rama's image. He suddenly fell at its feet and, thinking of Sai, said 'Save me. Save me. I will give up all my police efforts'. Khana Bhil was softened. Instead of shooting at both Ganpat Rao and the image, he said, 'I let you off this time. But if you again interfere in my affairs, you are a dead man. Remember.' But the ambition of Ganpat Rao was not to be quenched. Again he got information about Khana Bhil's movements and communicated it to the authorities, with the result that a

police force armed with carbines, etc., was sent to surround the hillock on which Khana Bhil and his men had pitched their camp. A fierce battle was fought between the dacoit gang and the police, and Khana Bhil effected his escape. Ganpat Rao knew that his life was doomed. So he went up to Nana Chandorkar, and with his good offices secured a medical certificate and got relieved of his detective duties. Thus for a second time his prayer to Baba to save his life was effectual. Again for a second time he refused to resign. Having so far successfully duped Baba, he thought he was safe. But he hardly knew how many strings Baba had to his bow.

The third occasion came and then Das Ganu was in a tight fix. When he was the second in command at the Station, the station Officer left him in charge. And Das Ganu in a lordly way wanted to enjoy his time, and went home leaving a constable in charge of the station. Just at that time, a village munsif had sent up a *thoti* with a fine collected from some person against whom a warrant had been sent for collection. That money, Rs. 32/-, was left by the thoti with the constable there in charge, without any person to witness. The constable told the thoti that the Station Officer was on leave, that no receipt would be granted then, that he might go away, and that the receipt would be sent to the village in due course. So, the poor thoti went away, and the constable swallowed up the money. Ganpat Rao knew nothing of it. However, the authorities finding that Rs. 32 had not been collected, sent up a second warrant for the collection of the fine. The party showed the receipt from the Village Munsif. The Village Munsif, when asked, said that he had sent the money to Ganpat Rao's Station, and so the enquiring officer came to the Station and asked the Station Officer who pointed out that at the particular time and date when the money came, he was on leave. Then who was in charge? Ganpat Rao was in charge. Ganpat Rao was the man who swallowed that (fine) amount of Rs. 32 was the conclusion arrived at by the enquiring officer. Ganpat Rao was asked for an explanation. He said he knew nothing. But there was no escaping the fact that money had been sent that day, and was paid at the station as the thoti testified. Then Ganpat Rao, finding that there was not only no chance of his getting the Sub Inspectorship but a good

chance of his getting into the jail, solemnly swore to Baba that this time he would positively quit service. He went further and mentioned his willingness to resign to the enquiry officer who, thereupon, made him pay up Rs. 32, and then discharged him, taking of course his resignation also. Thus Baba succeeded in making Ganpat Rao quit that service, a service, which would prevent Ganpat Rao from becoming the high spiritual personage that he was subsequently to develop into.

Baba used to call him 'Ganu'. When Ganpat Rao came and said, 'I have now left my service; I and my wife have to stand in the streets, as we have no property or income', Baba said, Ganu, I shall provide for you and your family'. (Compare Krishna's promise "*Yoga Kshemam Vahami aham*" BG IX 22). Baba then asked him to go on with his Brahminical duties, puranic studies, and kirtans at which he was excellent, From the day of his loss of service, i.e. 1903, up to this time, Ganpat Rao was never in want either for food or for clothing, and has even become the owner of some lands yielding him sufficient support. And in 1919 his wife died issue less, leaving him without any encumbrances. Baba told him to attend to his kirtans. Das Ganu was specially good at kirtans. He had a fine metallic voice, and he was a vary able performer of kirtans. He would hold an audience of 2,000 people spell-bound in rapt attention listening to him for six or eight hours, and as he never asked for even one pie and made no collections, his kirtans were popular, and in all his kirtans, he would place Baba's picture next to him and even though his katha was about Tukaram or Namdev or Jnanadev, yet he would always refer to Sai Baba as the living Sam or Satpurusha, i.e. as the present Great Saint, whom it would be a great blessing for people to have darsan of, as the very darsan would purify and benefit the visitor. As soon as his kirtans ended, people started in numbers to go to Shirdi and see Sai Baba. These numbers included high officials of good and great position, as also the poor. Thus he has been the means of sending some tens of thousands of people to Baba. He is still living (1955) and justly styled Hari Bhakta Parayana Kirtankar. Baba developed his nature and purified it by making him spend his time whenever he went to Shirdi in reading Vishnu Sahasranama at a temple there. Das Ganu

Maharaj thus got highly purified and was highly devoted to Baba. His purification and development are marked in various ways, and Baba's favour to him on the spiritual side is so vast and varied that it is impossible to sketch them out, especially as Das Ganu Maharaj is still living and we have no right to vivisect that Maharaj. We shall mention, however, a few facts showing how Sai Baba favoured him in addition to relieving him of the two great hampering curses upon him, namely, the dance mania and the Foujdar mania. Baba gave him a special capacity to understand things which others could not ordinarily understand. Baba gave him special hints on special occasions. We shall instance two of these below.

Das Ganu Maharaj wished to write a Mahratti commentary upon Amritanubhava, a famous Mahratti religious treatise, and that was considered to be impossible. A pandit told him that he could not possibly catch all the meaning of Jnana Dev, the author, and express it in his work. Das Ganu went to Baba, prayed for and immediately got his blessing. Then, he began to write his explanations of the riddles, seeming contradictions and apparently meaningless dicta of Amritanubhava. He found the heart of the author and brought it out by a number of illustrations. The illustrations he mostly drew from Baba's talk which he heard at Shirdi. So he succeeded in presenting Amritanubhava in such a way as to satisfy even keen critics; and the pandit who first considered it impossible was satisfied that Das Ganu's work was a success.

Next Das Ganu was anxious to render even a Sanskrit Upanishad, namely, Isavasya Upanishad, into Mahratti. This famous Upanishad consists of only 18 verses. It is full of great thoughts and has been considered by Mahatma Gandhi to be peculiarly important. Mahatma Gandhi said that if the whole of Hindu spiritual literature were gone leaving only this Isa Upanishad, the whole of Hindu dharma could be reconstructed with this alone. Though the Upanishad has received such high encomia, it is a very difficult and tough Upanishad even for separation of sentences and phrases in it, and much more for the interpretation of the same. Different writers have adopted widely different courses. Taking even the very first verse, the punctuation varies. Having so many difficulties in the way

of his ambition, Das Ganu Maharaj went to Baba. Baba said, 'What difficulty is there in this? You had better go, as usual, to Kaka Dixit's bungalow in Ville Parle. And there that (cooly girl) Malkarni, will give you the meaning'. People would laugh at a great pandit like Das Ganu getting interpretation of an Upanishad from a cooly girl. But all the same Das Ganu went to Kaka's bungalow. He slept there. When he woke up in the morning, he heard a girl (it must be the Malkarni mentioned by Baba, he thought) singing songs in great joy. She was praising some orange coloured silk sari, wondering at its fineness and the beauty of its borders, and the floral embroidery on it. Then he just peeped to see who the songster was. The songster had no sari. She wore a rag which was not silk, nor orange coloured, had no borders and no embroidery. He pitied the girl and got a friend to give her a sari—a small cheap sari. She wore it just one day, and went about enjoying it. But the very following day, she cast it aside, again wore her tatters and again began to sing joyously the song about the orange coloured sari and its beauty. Then Das Ganu understood the Upanishad. He found out that the girl's happiness lay not in the external sari which she had 'thrown away' (*tena tyaktena*, which means, that being thrown away) but in herself. And Isavasya Upanishad says the same thing. 'All this world', says the first verse, 'is covered by the Maya of Iswara. So *enjoy bliss*, not by having the externals, but by rejecting the externals (*Tenatyaktena*)'. '*Tena Tyaktena*' might mean being content with what God gives you. The girl was happy as she was contented. Thus Baba taught Isa Upanishad to Ganu through a cooly girl. Baba's ways of teaching were and are peculiar and different in the case of different individuals.

Das Ganu has been helped in numerous other ways, but it is sufficient here to note that Baba gave him the assurance that he would provide for his temporal welfare (*Yogakshema*) so that he might bravely and calmly start his spiritual career. And Baba kept his word, Baba always keeps his word. Baba thus provided completely for the temporal welfare of a man without any employment and any property. When he thought there was nothing for him to depend upon, Baba provided everything, and Das Ganu had always been very well off temporally. Even now he has got properties though he has transferred them to

his adopted son. As for the spiritual uplift, it is impossible to conceive of any greater benefit than wrenching one away from the two great ropes that were dragging Ganpat Rao downwards, namely, the lewd village dramas which Ganpat Rao was playing in and the soul-destroying police work, the wickedness of which would be heightened by the ambition to rise to Sub Inspectorship in double quick time. The way in which Baba responded to prayers and saved him, time and again, from dismissal or punishment would quite suffice to impress the mind of Ganpat Rao with the fact that Baba is omnipotent, is everywhere, watching and attending to his prayers, and is ever looking after him. Baba watched him at every place to which he went and took the appropriate measure that was urgently needed for his welfare. What else can be God except that which watches us everywhere and further takes adequate steps to see that harm does not befall us but real benefit is conferred on us? What is God except that which hears and grants prayer?

Baba naturally did his very best for this Das Ganu but, unfortunately, (as we see in the cases of most devotees contacting Baba) there are obstacles due perhaps to poorva karma which prevent one responding in the correct way to such high influence as Baba's. Even after so much of proof of Baba's omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, and miraculous help for Ganu's benefit, Ganu did not fully derive the idea that Baba was God. So many others for whom Baba did even less were full of the faith that Baba was God. No doubt Ganu sang of Baba that he was God in fine terms set to music. But Ganu's conviction was superficial and not deep. Das Ganu's faith being very poor and very weak in Baba's divinity, Baba desired to impress on Ganu, His (Baba's) Godhead and to make him and his other disciples realise him (Baba) properly. For that purpose, he exhibited *chamatkars*, one of which is as follows.

On a certain occasion, Das Ganu wanted to go for a bath to the Godavari river which in ordinary parlance is termed 'Ganga' (the Ganges, the most sacred river). That river is four or five miles away from Shirdi, and when Ganu asked for permission to go to "Ganga", Baba answered, 'Why go there? Is not Ganga

here?' Ganu felt very much dissatisfied. Ganu was the author of the Arti song which runs as follows and which was even being sung at Baba's puja.

Shirdi Maje Pandharipura Sai Baba Ramaavara

This means 'My Pandharpur or place of pilgrimage is Shirdi, and the God that sanctifies that place (Vittal) is Sai Baba'; that is, Sai is Mahavishnu from whose feet Ganges is perennially flowing. This song is sung by many and at least a few really think in their hearts that Sai Baba is really Maha Vishnu. For, what is Mahavishnu? Maha Vishnu is the protecting form of God. God has three functions, namely, creation, protection, and final withdrawal, which also is a form of protection. The protecting aspect of God is called Maha Vishnu. So Sai Baba, the person who has protected Das Ganu and innumerable others, and who is doing it even today on a vast scale from one end of the country to the other, is certainly exercising the functions of Maha Vishnu⁸. All Divinity is one. Call it or Him by any name and carry on your worship according to any religion and adopt any set of doctrines or metaphysical or philosophical basis for your ideas and actions, the end reached is the same, the one pure and perfect Bliss. When the goal is reached by the most advanced souls of any country or sect, the experience is the same. But before the end is reached, the modes adopted and the explanations given by sets differ so greatly sometimes as to cause religious differences of a bitter sort — and quarrels, battles or wars are waged on account of religious or sectarian zeal. The common run of men look to externals alone and the inner kernel of all religion is beyond their grasp. Sri Das Ganu on account of his poorva karma of former births and even the karma of his present earlier life could not rise to this view. Baba had to refine his nature and wash away the effects of birth, breeding and past habits. There are many methods that are adopted for this purpose. Pilgrimages, and visits to saints at those places (for many holy persons visit such places) have their use.

⁸ Reader, if you very earnestly wish to have this experience now, you can have it.

REDEMPTION NEVER IMPOSSIBLE

Amongst the important lessons to be derived from Baba's dealing with and teaching Das Ganu is the following matter of the utmost importance in the daily life of thousands of our readers. The state in which Das Ganu was in 1890 or 1892 when he approached Baba was very grave, and in the view of ordinary persons absolutely hopeless. No one would think that a man with a hoard of past karma and vicious tendencies which had struck deep root could possibly be saved from them in one life, more especially when his tastes had attracted him to a profession and to activities which gave ample scope for such tendencies. Any other person would have abandoned the task as hopeless, but Sai, like Chaitanya, i.e. Lord Gauranga, did not despair of redeeming such a soul. There are several votaries unfortunately singing the song—

Na madida karma baiavanta vaagidare

Neemaaduvadu Eno Hariye.

This means, 'O God, if the sins I have committed are so powerful, what can you do?' This despair is properly met in the Bhagavata:

NAMASMARANA

Naamno asti yaavati scaktih paapa nirharane hareh

Taavat kartum nascaknoti paatakam paataki janah

This means, "No sinner can commit so many or so heinous sins as to make it impossible for God's name to redeem him." It is folly and ignorance of a highly self-destructive sort on the part of a sinner to limit the power of God to redeem him. Hence neither Sai nor Chaitanya despaired of redeeming desperate characters. Just as Chaitanya drew Madho and Jagai from the depths of an almost bottomless pit to the heights of saintliness, so Baba has done in the case of Das Ganu.

The words used in the first stanza above quoted show the power of God's name. It is just as well to point out that practically God's name and God are not different. The name has a power because it is God's name. If it is the name of the devil or any other person, it would not have such power. But the name is so closely intertwined with the object that even philosophers confound the two.

There is a school of nominalist philosophers who say that everything is only name and that there is nothing beyond. Commonsense rebels against this view and most people join the conceptualist or realist school saying that objects exist apart from names and we have a conception of an object to which name is applied as a handle. No doubt the cleverness of songsters and poets makes them attach undue importance to the bare fact of the name as in the following stanza:—

Ninyaako ranga ninhanga yako

Nee naama bala ondu iddare sako

This means, 'O, Ranga (or God), what is the use of your prowess or anything else except your name? The power of your name is sufficient'. The songster begins to instance the cases of Draupadi, Gajendra, Ajamila, etc., to prove that the name was sufficient in all these cases to save them and that God himself was not wanted for the purpose of saving. This is obviously absurd in the case of Draupadi and Gajendra where God himself took action or appeared and saved the devotees. Only in the case of Ajamila, there is some degree of justification for the poetic flair, and perhaps some basis for it in the Bhagavata stanza which runs as follows:—

Etavata alam agha nirharanaya pumsam

sankritanam bhagavato gunakarma namnam

Aakruscya putram aghavan yat Ajamilo apt

Naarayana iti Mriyamanaiyaya muktim.

This means. To wipe off sins of men, it is enough if they go on with *sankirtanam*, that is, good singing or recital of God's *gunas*, (qualities), *karma* (deeds), and *nama* (names). (For example) Ajamila, though a great sinner, by barely calling out the name of his child Narayana at the moment of death obtained mukti. This seems a basis for saying that the bare utterance of God's name, even though the utterance was only of the name of the child bearing God's name, at the moment of death, would have the effect of saving a man. The proposition thus stated seems too wide and too wild. In the case of Ajamila, however, the man had been formerly a great bhakta leading a very pure life and

would have constantly used the term Narayana with very holy associations. Some of those associations might have dawned upon his mind when he uttered that name with reference to his child Narayana and therefore made Lord Narayana send his angels to save Ajamila who was just about to be dragged away by the myrmidons of Yama to Hell for punishment for his numerous sins. No doubt Vyasa adds a general statement—

Sanketyam parihasyam va sthobham helanam eva va

Vaikunta naama grahanam ascesha agha haram viduh.

This means, '(Even) where God's name happens to be used merely as a token or symbol agreed upon by people to represent something worldly or is uttered in jest or by way of ridicule, still the utterance of God's name removes every sin.' Using God's name in jest or ridicule is known to many. People swear by God for purposes of emphasis without thinking of holiness. All the same, if they have been listening to bhajans, kirtans, sacred reading, etc., in which these names of God have been associated with things holy, the effect of ridicule or jest may not completely wipe off the holy associations of those names. As for *Sanketyam*, an instance may be given. Amongst a South Indian community, the name Govinda or "*Midasannam Govindappa*" (i.e. the narrow necked Govinda) is used to denote the drink bottle. Even for that purpose, if the name is constantly used, the utterance of Govinda's name will have some merit and may help in salvation. Anyhow, apart from all the above and apart from the school of nominalism, the value of God's name consists in the fact that people have very little knowledge of what the substance of God is, and they have to handle God only through the name. Therefore, as stated in Sainatha Manana, 62 '*Abhinnatvar Naama Naaminoh* i.e. there is no difference between name and the possessor of the name (in effect.) This may remind us of modern philosophies which doubt whether in every object there is any "substance" behind attributes, or appearances and whether the attributes or appearances are anything more than mere names or ideas.

Coming back to the question of the use of God's name for eradicating sins from one's nature, we find that Valmiki and other authors of great works on

ethics, ancient and modern, stress the importance of the constant recall to the mind of God and his qualities, especially through japa, japa being so holy as to make the mind get drowned in God so as to justify the remark of Lord Krishna—*Yajnaanaam Japa Yajno Asmi*, that is, "Of all yajnas, I am the yajna consisting of Japa". Japa is the *sankirtanam* above referred to. When the name is uttered, the guna and karma above referred to follow immediately into the mind of the japa karta by the law of association of ideas. That is why people are content to begin with a repetition of the holy names even when not attended with perfect realisation of the holiness of the name as in the case of the hunter who repeated "*Mara, Mara*" and became the Rishi Valmiki. Many a man goes on repeating like a parrot the names he finds either in a book or uttered by some other persons. But gradually as the repetition goes on, the sacred influence pours in especially if he has the good fortune of having the company of the other person or persons who are inspired by that holy influence and if the surroundings as in a temple or bhajan hall are specially favourable. That is why Baba asked Das Ganu to take up Vishnu Sahasranama and retreat from the crowds of the Dwarakamayee and go to a sequestered temple like the Vittal temple in the village and go on there with his frequent recitals or repetitions of Sahasranama. Baba's advice in this matter was not confined to Das Ganu. He gave similar advice to Shama and in fact took away a Ramadas's Sahasranama and handed it over to him so that he may have the advantage of the Sahasranama japa, though poor Shama did not know how to read Sanskrit, the conjunct consonants of which defy the poor skill of villagers like Shama to read or make them out. The Vishnu Sahasranama is so vast and the import of the thousands of Names is so great that any one who goes through them carefully with the help of Sankara or other Bhashya thereon must be struck by the fact that powerful material imbedded in Vishnu Sahasranamam must suffice for the purification of any soul. The experience of thousands justifies them in the belief that what is claimed in the Vishnu Sahasranama stotra itself is right. That stotra says at the end that a person making a parayana thereof will obtain issue if he is issueless, wealth if he has no wealth, power, fame, glory and success if he is without these and, it adds that

sins of ages would be washed off. In order to give the benefit of the Sahasranama to those who have unfortunately not the time nor the opportunity to repeat, the bare repetition of one name contained therein, namely, the name 'Ram' would be equivalent to the merit of repeating all the thousand names.

Sri Raama Raama Raameti

Rame Raame Manorame

Sahasranaama tattulyam

Raamanaama Varaanane.

That is, 'One who repeats only the name of Rama will obtain the merit of repeating the Sahasranama itself.' We must note also that Sankaracharya gives the advice.

Gey am Geeta Naama Sahasram

Dhyeyam Srtpati Rupam Ajasram.

This means, 'What you have to recite is (1) the Gita and (2) the Vishnu Sahasranama, and what you have to think of in your mind all the time is the form of the Lord'. That is, the repetition of Sahasranama or Rama *nama* is best, if it is accompanied by a mental figure of the Lord, as no doubt the mental figure of the Lord helps in removing all sin and raising one to the heights of spirituality or Godhead. That may explain why Baba advised so many of his bhaktas to repeat Sahasranama or Rama *nama*. For example he gave the advice to Mrs. G. S. Khaparde, who was massaging him and whom he massaged in turn, "Say, 'Rajaram, Rajaram,' constantly; that would remove all troubles and take you to the Lord." Baba also told N.R. Sahasrabuddhe that he was to repeat Ram Nam into which he had already been initiated. Also he told M. W. Pradhan. that he must repeat the 13 lettered mantra into which he had already been initiated, namely, 'Sri Rama Jaya Rama, Jaya Jaya Rama'.

Baba was not content with merely giving advice. He preached only what he himself practised, and he told H.S. Dixit (Gospel 195) that he had been going on with Hari Nama Japa constantly as a result of which Hari (God) appeared before him, and that thereafter his giving of medicines was needless, for his bare giving of udhi with remembrance of Hari would suffice to cure all ills. He also said

(Gospel 198) that he had heart disease (literal or metaphorical) and that he kept Vishnu Sahasranama close to the heart and that Hari descended from the Sahasranama and cured the trouble.

But whatever Baba did, Das Ganu stuck mostly to his old set of ideas which formed the foundation for his spiritual progress. He could not get rid of the idea that the great thing for him to do was to get to Pandharpur, the Bhooloka Vaikuntam as it is called, in Asvin and Kartik months and see the holy image of Vittal there and worship it. That Vittal was God. It alone was God. And if he was to get vision of God it must be by that form appearing before him in a vision.

Das Ganu was told by Baba to go through Bhagavata reading in 7 days (this is called *Saptaha*) and he then told Baba that he would go on with *Saptaha* and Baba must see to it that he (Das Ganu) got sakshatkar as the result. 'If there is intense (*Bhav*) concentration, then Sakshatkar can be had' was what Baba gave as answer. Ganu went through Saptaha. But there was no sakshatkara for the obvious reason that Ganu's mind could not attain the needed intensity of concentration.

When he was in this mentality, NGC, his former master (for this was in 1912 or so when Ganu had retired from service) was asking him to stay on for Asvin at Shirdi and do his *kathas* there. At once Das Ganu thought that Baba was compelling him through N G C to keep off from Vittal at Pandharpur. His thought then was "How is he (Baba) God, who keeps me away from God (Vittal) at Pandharpur?" Baba noting his thought told Nana Chandorkar to send him away to Pandharpur, and so he went and returned later on to Shirdi. Then he came to Baba and said, 'When will you give me Sakshatkar?' (Paragraph 129 of B.C. & S.). Baba said, 'You see Me. This is Sakshatkar. I am God'. Then Das Ganu said, 'I expected you would say so. But I am not satisfied with it'. Das Ganu considered that Vittal of Pandharpur alone was God, and not the Sai form that he saw at Shirdi. He concluded that it was not in his destiny to have Sakshatkara of Vittal. But to understand Baba's answer, we might refer to a parallel passage in St. John's Gospel, Chapter XIV, verses 8 to 14. There, Phillip, the follower of Jesus said, 'Lord, show us the Father. And it suffices us'. Jesus says to him, "Have I

been so long a time with you, and yet hast thou not known me? The Father that dwelleth in Me. He doeth the works (i.e. miracles or *chamatkars*). Believe me that I am in the Father and He is in Me, or else believe me for the very works' sake. If Ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it. I am in my Father and you in Me and I in *you*.⁹

This peculiar lack of faith of Das Ganu was not noticed by himself till after Baba left the body. In 1919, that is, a year after Baba shed his mortal coil, Das Ganu was at his usual place, Handed, where there was a saint, with wonderful spirituality, on a rock. When others went to see that saint, he received them. But whenever Das Ganu tried to see him, he evaded him. But on one occasion in 1919, when his wife died, he sent some food to that saint and saw him later. Das Ganu wanted to know why the saint was evading him. Then the saint answered, 'You call yourself a Kirtankar. Why then have you "Ahamkar" (Egotism)?' Das Ganu pleaded that every one had Ahamkar, and that it was impossible to avoid it. Then that saint said, 'Shall I tell you what sort of Ahamkar you have? Is not Sai Baba your Guru? And shall I say what you have done with him?' Das Ganu said, 'Yes'. The saint asked, 'Did not Baba produce water from his feet, and what did you do with it? You sprinkled it on your head, but would not put it into your mouth, because you are a Brahmin and the Ganga was coming from the feet of the mosque dwelling Baba. Is it not Ahamkara of yours?' Das Ganu felt the force of the saint's observations. Das Ganu's inability to think of Baba as pure Vittal or God is an instance where a person gets very great benefits from Baba but something or other hinders his deriving the fullest benefit as prejudices die hard and old habits cannot be easily erased.

We shall give a few examples of how Baba helped Das Ganu temporally and spiritually. Once when Das Ganu and Bere, an agricultural inspector, were to leave Shirdi for Kopergaon to catch a train for which there was plenty of time, they went to take Baba's leave. Baba in giving the leave, said "Start at once, don't stop but go straight to Kopergaon." They acted on his advice. Other

⁹ This means for ordinary men, **God** is to be seen only by regarding as God a highly gifted Saint evidently filled with Divinity and .showing his divinity by performance of **superhuman** acts called miracles.

tongawallahas told them to wait and go with them on that dangerous road to have the benefit of their company. They however followed Baba's advice and drove straight on and arrived safe at the Kopergaon station. The other tongawallahs who came up later were in time to catch the train but they were waylaid by highway robbers. Baba's advice had saved Bere and Ganu from that mishap.

Baba similarly tried to save Das Ganu from being attacked by the inner enemies (*Kama, Krodha*) also. Baba set before him the ideal of being totally free from those six enemies. That, however, was no joke. Like so many other devotees, this apostle also had his slips. But Baba very kindly pulled him up and corrected him off and on. For instance, on one occasion there was a feast at Shirdi where sira was prepared and distributed. Baba asked Ganu, "Did you get sira at that person's house?" "No, Baba" said Ganu, "that man is my enemy and did not invite me." Baba, at once rebuked him and said, "What is this sira and who eats it? Do not say of anyone that he is your enemy". Baba wanted to point out to him that he is the soul which neither eats nor has any other physical function and that all souls are in essence one and the same, viz., Paramatma. To one who has realised himself as Paramatma, there can be no enemy at all.

Compare Shri Sankara's saying in Charpata Panjarika stotra.

Sarvasmin api pascya aafmaanam

Sarvatra utsrija bheda ajnaanam

Tvayi mayi cha anyatra eko Vishnuh

Vyartham kupyasi sarva sahashnuh

which means, "The one Vishnu (God) is in you, in me and others; all he endures. Your anger is senseless. See the (same) Atman in every one. Differentiation (or discrimination) is ignorance. Avoid it everywhere." Sai Baba has stressed the same truth of identity of all souls not merely on Das Ganu but also on R. B. Purandhare, Narayan Ashram, etc. It goes without saying that Das Ganu could not possibly rise to the desired height of realizations of unity of all souls, or the perception of God in all or any creatures.

The truths taught by Baba are so peculiar to each and applicable and intelligible only in special circumstances. Hence, we must content ourselves with only one more illustration and stop. Das Ganu Maharaj was a very severe critic and occasionally uttered words that wounded the hearts of others and produced other evil effects. On one occasion, he had used hard words and defamatory language against a devotee living at Shirdi, who had done splendid work to make Sai Samsthan highly attractive and who drew numerous influential and other people to Baba's feet. When Das Ganu vented one of his frequent abuses against that devotee, Baba sent for him and pointed out that the work of attracting devotees to Baba's feet was rightly prized and practised by Das Ganu himself on a vast scale and yet he was defaming a person who carried on the same work and he thereby hindered that work. Baba thus made him acknowledge his error and insisted on his prostrating himself before that devotee and begging pardon. So Das Ganu adopted that advice and prostrated himself before that devotee and prayed for pardon. He thus gained more self-control and more humility, and also noted with appreciation the value of the lesson taught in Bhagavata 11th Skanda.

Na stuvita na nindeta kurvatah saadhu asaadhu vaa

Vadato guna doshaabbyam varjitah samadrik munih"

which means, 'the sage must have equal vision and should neither eulogise the doers or utterers of good nor decry the doers or utterers of evil.'

Before closing this chapter, it is our duty to draw prominent attention to the chief merits and excellences of Das Ganu Maharaj. He is well known not merely as a performer of Kirtanas (Harikathas) with great ability for about fifty years, but also as a composer and writer of saintly lives. Even before 1903, his literary skill made him produce fine verses on Sivaji, the national hero, for use at the Ganapati utsava in Maharashtra. As verses on Sivaji rouse up patriotism and the National spirit, which the foreign rulers then in power dreaded, he was called on by his Inspector to explain how he, a Government servant, took this prominent part in helping on a national movement. His answer was that he was an "Asukavr, that verses in Lavani metre flowed out of him at the barest request of

anybody and that the request of some one made him sing impromptu the song or verses on Sivaji. As a proof he offered to compose impromptu verses on the officer himself at once. The officer wished to test the truth of the statement and asked him for verses on himself (the officer). Ganu's *Asukavitva* or poetic genius was equal to the occasion. At once, he sang up the high qualities (real or fancied) of the officer, in lavani metre and in a few minutes there were numerous verses on the excellences of the officer who was greatly pleased and dropped the charge against Ganu then known merely by his police No (e.g. 808). Ganu could say with Alexander Pope that he "lisped in numbers for the numbers came." We need not draw the inference that his works were without depth of thought or other poetic attractions. By steady practice, he acquired considerable mastery of Mahrathi, his mother tongue. Some of his works were prescribed as text books once by the Bombay University. All his works are on noble topics. Mostly it is biography of the saints that he wrote. His command of Ovi, Dindi and other metres was excellent. An abundant use of alliteration and other figures of speech adorned his sonorous writings. Kirtankars who wished and wish to deliver kathas on famous saints could and can easily pick up one of his innumerable stories and please their audiences with parrot-like repetition of it. Even now, any one anxious to spend his time over saintly biography cannot do better than going through the following works (which have earned for him the title, the modern Mahipati, as Mahipati was the famous composer of the works dealing with ancient or medieval saints, in his works Santalilamrita etc.)

(1) Santakathamrita

(2) Arvachina Bhaktalilamrita

(3) Bhakta Saramrita

He began these works almost from 1903 when he quit service. And in these he incorporated the seven chapters (or kathas) which embodied Sai Baba's lilas or life and teachings. He is responsible for the discovery and publication of Sai Baba's early life and tutelage at Selu under Venkusa, which he found to be another name for Gopal Rao Deshmukh, ruler of Selu in Jintur Parganna. Baba had said that he had been delivered by his fakir foster mother to the Selu ruler,

who became his master, Guru and all-in-all. Freed from service shackles, Ganu started his research, ran upto Selu and discovered from Srinivas Rao, the Subedar of Selu in 1903, the ballads and family papers referring to his grandfather's grandfather, viz Gopal Rao Desmukh, the wonders his Bhakti performed, the conquests his military prowess achieved and the Moslem woman's child that became his devoted attendant and disciple to whom he, Gopal Rao (Venkatesa), gave initiation and the fact that at his (Gopal Rao's) grand passing away or Ascension (similar to Parikshit's passing away), the remains had to be interred and that they were interred in the *garba gruha* of Venkatesa temple that was erected thereon (as Gopal Rao was identified with Venkatesa or "Venkusa") and that it still stands and attracts the devotees of the surrounding places.

As this early history is very highly prized by Sai devotees and is essential for a proper understanding of Baba, their obligation to Das Ganu Maharaj is very deep. The earliest books on Sai Baba were the three chapters that Ganu produced and published in 1906 with the aid of funds contributed by H. V. Sathe.

Even during Baba's life in the flesh, Ganu was the person to deliver the annual harikathas (from 1914) at Shirdi at Baba's urus, the Ramanavami Utsava; and he has been keeping up the tradition of conducting that utsava for the last forty years.

Das Ganu Maharaja's frequent kirtans throughout Maharashtra have raised him in the estimation of all whether they are devoted to Sai Baba or not. His eminence may be seen from the fact that he was the President of the All India Sai Devotees' Conference held at Coimbatore in 1948.

He is the one surviving link with the nineteenth century amongst Baba's followers. He is ranked first among Baba's apostles, if we go by the number of devotees drawn to Baba. So many thousands learnt of Baba from him and have subsequently visited Baba or Shirdi and made Baba their own life long possession. Such a towering personality he is, despite his shortcomings. He had no English education, no contact with western culture and has no idea of the present day advance of modern civilization.

This eminent person however had his faults and foibles. Which human being is there free from these? Some have been noted in this sketch. Some others exposed him to attack from others. Even the Sansthan authorities had occasion to find fault with him. But after all is said and done. Das Ganu is a great soul, the living monument of Baba's might and kindness.

The chief lesson devotees learn from a study of his life is that Baba, the wondrous God-realiser can, turn the most hopeless material into saintly grandeur. What was Ganu's condition as a Rs 11 constable in 1890 or 1892 and what is his state now? This spiritual alchemist that turns baser nature into the gold of saintliness, that could turn a petty minded lewd constable into the moulder of spiritual destinies of tens of thousands, this Sai Baba,— what can he not accomplish for each of us? "*Kshipram Bhavati Dharmatma, Scascvat Scantim nigachchati*" i.e. "Quickly he becomes virtuous and attains permanent peace" is what Sri Krishna promised in the Gita for even sinners that approached Him. That he, as Sri Sai Baba, has performed and proved true in many a case, including the case of Das Ganu Maharaj.

Apart from the thousands of pages that Das Ganu's big works cover, there are several minor pieces by which he will ever be remembered. The Shirdi Arti includes several of these bits, which have sunk deep into the hearts of devotees and which will continue as long as the Shirdi Shrine and Artis last. For instance:

*Shirdi Maajhe Pandharipura Sai Baba Ramaa Vara,
Suddha Bhakti Chandra Bhaaga Bhaava Pundalika jaga,
Yaho yaho avaghe Jana Kara Babasi Vandana,
Ganu Mhane Baba Sayee Dhamva Pava Majhe Ayi*

which means "Shirdi is my Pandharpur (the most holy shrine for Vaisnavites) and God worshipped there is Sai Baba (i.e. Sai is Vittal or Narayana). The holy river called Chandrabhaga found at Pandharpur is represented at Shirdi by pure devotion, and in that river the holiest spot, viz. Pundalika Temple is represented at Shirdi, by intense concentration. All you people, come up, come up and do reverence to Sai Baba. Ganu says. Oh Sai Baba Mother mine, run up and

catching me in your arms, caress me." This intense appeal has caught the fancy of lakhs of people and this song is sung at Pooja and Bhajan all over India.

Two brilliant prayers of Garni in Hindi are also embodied in the Shirdi Arti and are very popular.

Pada (41)

Sai rahama najara karanaa, bachchomka paalana karana

(Burden)

Jaanaa thumane jagat pasaara sabahi jhuta jamaana

(Sai) /

My andhaa hoom bandaa aapaka, mujhako prabhu dikhalaana (Sai)

2

Daasa garni kahe aba kyaa bolum, thaka gayee

merirasana (Sai)

3

which means

O Sai show your mercy, protect this little baby (Burden)

1. *The expansive Universe, you know is a mass of deception*

(Burden)

2. *I your slave am blind. Reveal the Lord to me (Burden)*

3. *Says Ganu, How can I say aught more? Exhausted is my tongue. (Burden)*

Pada (12)

Rahama najara karo aba more Sai, thuma bina

Nahi mujhe maabaapabhayai (Burden)

My andhaahoom bandhaa thumaara

Mynaajanoo Alla-ilahi

/

Khalii jamaanaa myne gamaaya

Sathi aakharakaa, kiya na koyi (Burden) 2

Apane masidakaa jhaadoo ganoo hai

malils hamaare, thuma Baaba Saayi (Burden) 3

which means,

Show unto me, Now thy mercy

For excepting thee I have nobody.

No father, mother, brother (Burden)

1. *Your slave am I, Sightless is my eye*
I do not now descry, Aught of the Deity (Burden)
2. *Down have I fallen to the earth.*
For my last moment, no friend I made (Burden)
3. *Ganu is (but) the broomstick of your mosque.*
You are our Lord and Master O Sai Baba (Burden)

The above named pieces which have already attracted Sai devotees have been included in the Nandaneep Picture *Shirdiche Sri Sai Baba*, the new Sai film exhibited at the Majestic Theatre at Bombay. These will serve to attract thousands of others to Sai Bhakti and Das Ganu will be endeared to the heart of new devotees as he is to the old; both will pray:—May Hari Bhakta Parayana Das Ganu Maharaj be spared to us for a long time to carry on his Sai service and service to Mankind.

P. S :—The original verses giving the phalasruti of Vishnu sahasranama have not been quoted above because they are too long and also because editions differ in the wording and numbering of the verses. But in this note we might as well give some of them as they might strike some readers as worthy of their attention. They are numbered 130, 142, and 152 in one of the editions.

130 Vasudevascrayo Martyo Vasudevaparayanah
Sarvapapa Viscuddhatma Yaati Brahma sanaatanam

i.e. One who makes Vasudeva (i. e. Maha Vishnu) his goal and refuge is purified of all sins and reaches the Eternal Brahman.

142 Namnaam sahasram yo adhite Dwadasvam Mama sannidhow
Sa nirdahati paapaani Kalpakoti scatani cha

i.e. He who repeats this sahasranama in my presence, on a Dwadasi day will have his sins (i.e. sinful Karma) burnt out— even sins numbering trillions. (The mention of the special excellence of the Dwadasi day does not affect the merit of the repetition on other days).

And

152 Aarta Vishanna scithilascha bheetah

ghoresha cha Vyadhishu vartamanah
Sankeertya Naarayana scabda maatram;
Vimukta dhukha sukhino bhavantu

which means: —

Those in trouble, dejected, shattered, the terror stricken, and those suffering from loathsome diseases, let them repeatedly utter the name Narayana, be freed from grief and become happy.