

CHAPTER V

Anna Saheb Dabolkar (Hemadpant)

The mantle of H. S. Dixit fell on Govind Raghunath Dabolkar called Anna Saheb Dabolkar who proved a good Elisha following in the footsteps of the Elija Dixit. The two were very well acquainted with each other though occupying widely different positions in the world. Dixit was a well read B.A.,LL.B. a solicitor with a great reputation and vigorously carrying on his activities in political, legislative, legal, municipal and social affairs, having an All India fame. Dabolkar was only a humble Government servant devoid of any of those activities and unequipped with the high education and studies and contacts of the former. Anyhow the two got into contact and along with the famous novelist H. N. Apte compared notes and found they had common tastes and uncommon ambition specially in the spiritual field. They agreed that a Samartha Sadguru like Ramdas of Sivaji was decidedly the best person to resort to, if one could be found. They were all feeling that no such person had yet appeared in their horizon. They agreed between themselves that if it was the lot of anyone of them to light on a such a blazing light, he should straightway inform the other two and enable them to share the discovered treasure. Dixit was the first one to find the treasure, in the person of Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi in 1909. He at once communicated it to the others. He wrote from Shirdi to Anna Saheb Dabolkar about Sai's greatness and insisted on his visiting Baba.

Dabolkar was somewhat impressed. But he could not definitely make up his mind. A self-made man who studied only upto the fifth standard and passed

his public service examination, obtaining the post of a Village talati and rising from that humble position to the posts of mamlatdar and first class magistrate by sheer ability.—he was also a good student of works like Eknath Bhagavat, Sankara's Viveka Chudamani and he felt that self reliance was the first and foremost virtue in his nature. Contact with numerous Prarthana Samajists also weakens belief in or at least reliance on saints and sadhus. So he was being pressed by his doubts about the good of a guru. When Easter vacation came in 1910, he almost made up his mind and did actually prepare himself for a trip to Shirdi. But the day on which he came to that decision, he learnt that a friend of his lost his son and lost him even though that friend's guru was by his side. "If a guru could not save the boy from death what is the good of a Guru?" was the powerful thought swaying him and he gave up his Shirdi trip. Later on Chandorkar pressed him to go to Sai and then he started (and by the lucky or foreordained intervention of a Mahomadan friend was prevented from missing his train). At last he went to Shirdi where Dixit met him and the rest of his story is narrated below.

Here it is enough to point out that Dixit had a great part in drawing Dabolkar to Baba. Baba told him, 'Kaka is a good man. Go on listening to him'. Baba made him stick to Dixit who was in many ways better fitted to benefit by contact with Baba than he. His faith and fervour grew by Dixit's contact. Even at the last moment of Dixit, Dabolkar was by his side and had to attend to the disposal of Dixit's body after noting how he was "taken in a Virnana" by Baba. Till then both were working at the Sai Lila Masik for the spread of Sai faith and both were in the Samsthan Committee managing its affairs. When Dixit passed away, Dabolkar was fully prepared to carry on Dixit's work as Honorary Secretary of the Samsthan and a vigorous propagandist and the Sai Lila Editor. In every way Dixit's mantle fell on him and he was a worthy successor and so the chapter after Dixit must deal with Dabolkar. His single monumental work 'Sai Satcharitra' alone entitles him to rank as the next among Sai's apostles.

After Das Ganu, the author of many essays or chapters on Sai Baba in his three big books called Arvachina Mala, Santakatamrita and Bhakti Lilamritha

naturally one must come to the person whose work bulks very largely in the minds of Maharashtra bhaktas of Sai Baba, and that is Hemad Pant (i.e. Annasaheb Dabolkar). His work 'Sai Satcharitra' in Marati Ovi verse extends to a thousand pages and is treated as Sai Ramayana or modern Guru Charitra with the respect due to ancient puranas by the Maharashtra Sai bhaktas, and even by others who get access to it through N.V. Gunjaji's English adaptation of it or translations in Telugu etc. This work is highly meritorious and has been the instrument for many people becoming Sai bhaktas. The verses are highly sonorous and the stories about Sai Baba collected from various individuals consisting of actual experiences of numerous bhaktas, have great charm and are always fresh. This work has a very interesting history. But let us first deal with the author.

The author was a Government servant till the year 1936, his grade being that of a resident magistrate. Before retiring in 1916, he was lucky enough to have contact with Baba. Both H.S.Dixit and Nana Saheb Chandorkar were friends of his. Both were pressing him to go up to see Sai Baba. He did not (as stated already) at first feel sufficient enthusiasm about seeing Sai Baba and his mind was wavering. To go or not to go, that was his question. He was rather attracted to general theories, and it was the Grace of Sai Baba that turned him into such an able author to design a practical work so full of inspiration. When after all he started in 1910 to go and see Sai Baba, he made up his mind to go by the wrong train. Suddenly a Mohamadan acquaintance of his asked him where he was going. He said he was going to Dadar to catch the Manmad Mail to go to Kopergaon for Shirdi. That gentleman at once corrected him saying that Manmad Mail did not stop at Dadar. He also said, 'you had better go straight to Victoria Terminus and there catch it, for there will be sufficient time for you to get a ticket'. He adopted that advice. If that gentleman had not met him, he would have got disappointed and probably returned home, and his mind would have been tossing again in doubt whether to see Sai Baba or not. So, he himself says, 'Baba's hand has been visible in moulding my fate ever from the beginning'. Then when he first went to Shirdi, he was so very superficial in his attachment to Baba

that he fell to a 30 minute discussion with Bala Saheb Bhate, an old friend of his, on the question whether a Guru was necessary or not. Dabolkar was hotly holding the position that a Guru was unnecessary, and that it was a question of free will of everyone to go whichever way he liked. But Bhate contested his views on both points. Bhate said that there was no free will at all, and that the only thing was destiny. On the question of the need for a Guru, he said, 'A Guru is absolutely essential'. Naturally after 30 minutes' talk they completely disagreed with each other, and there was no result from the discussion except Dabolkar's mind being restless. After that, they went to the mosque, and when they prostrated before Baba, Baba pointed to Dabolkar and said, 'What talk was going on there at the wada? And what did this Hemad Pant say (pointing his chin to Dabolkar)?' Dabolkar's name was not Hemad Pant at all. Hemad Pant was a great genius, who in the mediaeval age wrote grand works and so, in one way it was a compliment and in the other, the reference to Hemad Pant was to mere literary skill. Anyhow Dabolkar was impressed by the fact that Baba without being told of anything, knew that there was a discussion, and that he (Dabolkar) had engaged in it with all his literary ability and dialectical skill. However, Baba's influence did not stop with that.

Dabolkar had very poor ideas on the subject of saints. For one thing, even frivolous objections to saints weighed largely in his mind. It was well known that Baba's favoured devotee, H. S. Dixit, called Kaka Dixit, was at Shirdi with his daughter, whose life Baba had saved miraculously at Ville Parle when a whole almirah full of toys was about to fall on her. On that occasion Baba said to Dixit (who was with Baba at Shirdi when the child was in danger at Ville Parle) '*Arre Kaka. Tula Kaiji Kazli Maje Sarakarji Ahe*'. That is, 'Dixit, why should you have any anxiety? All cares are mine'. On that occasion, when a whole almirah full of toys fell on the child, she was unscathed. She got only a scratch on her arm due to her bangle being broken. Yet that child, when at Shirdi, directly under the nose of Baba, died, Baba could not save her. Then Dabolkar thought if a Guru cannot save the child of his own pet devotee, what is the good of a Guru?' This appeared to him at that time to be a sound argument, but he adds that destiny

proved too much for that argument, and his destiny was to compel him to become a Sai bhakta and get along whatever happened to his arguments about pupils and the nature of help rendered by Gurus to pupils or Sishyas. By constant association with devotees, he got wider and more correct ideas as to the functions of the Gurus. He gradually resigned himself more and more to be dealt with by Baba. Baba dealt with him in a very remarkable way, and from the very beginning, made up his mind as to what should become of this Dabolkar.

Dabolkar had been gathering information about the lilas of Baba and, being a very able writer with great command of Mahratti verse and prose, with a good grounding in religious literature, wished to write out a complete study of Baba's lilas, thus forming a good chronicle of Baba. This would be on the lines of Saraswati Gangadhar's *Guru Charitra*, and would give peace and happiness to people afflicted with sorrows and heavily laden with miseries of worldly existence. This would also give them Jnana or knowledge and wisdom on temporal and spiritual matters. The lilas would be both instructive and interesting like the Vedas, and, if meditated upon, they would bring about laya or union with Brahman and mastery of Yoga and Yoga Ananda. So, he made up his mind that he should collect these stories and treat the publication as his own *upasana* of his Guru. It would be specially valuable to those who could have no chance of seeing Baba and who would therefore get an idea of Baba through his collection. Baba's teachings and expressions were the outcome of his boundless and natural self-realisation and Baba himself (so Dabolkar thought), put this idea into his mind to collect and render them as Baba's life or chronicles. Then, he wanted permission for the work. So, Madhav Rao Desphande (known as Shama) was requested to tell Baba, and he told Baba thus: This Anna Saheb wishes to write your life. Don't say that you are a poor begging fakir, and there is no necessity to write your life. But if you agree and help him, he will write or rather your feet (or Grace) will accomplish this work. Without your consent and blessing, nothing can be done successfully'. Baba was moved and blessed Anna Saheb Dabolkar by giving him udhi and placed his Asirvada hand upon Dabolkar's head, and said, "Let him make a collection of stories and experiences, keeping notes and

memos. I will help him. He is only an outward instrument. I should write myself my life, and satisfy the wishes of my devotees. He should get rid of his ego. Place (or surrender) it at my feet. He who acts like this in life, him I will help most. What of my life's stories? I serve him in his house in all possible ways. When his ego is completely annihilated, and there is no trace left of it, I myself shall enter into him and shall myself write my life. Hearing my stories and teachings will create faith in devotees' hearts, and they will easily get self-realization and bliss. But let there be no insistence on establishing one's own view, and no attempt to refute others, opinions of any sort".

So spoke Baba. Then Dabolkar made the promise that he would be in that mood and would surrender. His close intimacy with Dixit, Chandorkar and other devotees enabled him to collect plenty of material. This permission was given in 1916, and when Baba passed away, Dabolkar had hardly written two or three chapters. Most of the work was written after 1918. He wrote 51 or 52 chapters and passed away in 1929. Meanwhile his chapters were published in the Sai Lila Masik which was started under his and Dixit's supervision. Gradually people began to read his work and were highly influenced thereby. The effect of the writing was even more on the author himself than on the readers. One effect of it was to completely change his outlook. When earlier he was introduced to Baba, Chinchinikar told Baba that Dabolkar had a big family and that Baba should bless him to get fresh employment after retirement to maintain his family. Baba said, This cursed Government service he will get. But let him look to my service. That is most important'. And as Baba stated, Dabolkar got again employed, though only for a short time, but the employment in Baba's service was permanent and grew in intensity from month to month and year to year. His thoughts were upon Baba and his lilas, and the effect was that he was Sai-minded, and Sai-possessed. His life and outlook were greatly altered. He felt he was under the protection of Baba and he says, The moment I touched Sai Baba's feet, I began a new lease of life. I felt myself much obliged to those who took me to Baba, and I consider them my real relatives. I cannot repay their debt. I make mental namaskar to them. A peculiarity of Sai Baba's darsan, as I find it, is that by his

darsan, our thoughts are changed, the force of previous action (karma) is abated, and gradually non-attachment or dispassion towards worldly objects grows up. It is by the merit of actions in many past births that such a darsan is got. And if only you see Sai Baba, really all the world assumes the form of Sai Baba'.

That Anna Saheb Dabolkar's thoughts were changed thoroughly, may be more amply set out in what followed. First when he went to Baba, he had just a bit of devotion to Baba, and his main nature was still egotistic, combative, and was largely concerned with worldly ambitions. From 1910-16, his progress was hardly noticeable. But in 1917, a change came and he himself sets it out in chapters XVIII and XIX of his book, and therefore, we shall now proceed to refer to them. When he was shampooing Baba's legs, one Mr. Sathe had a problem and that was mentioned to Baba. Sathe was directed by Baba to read Guru Charitra. and he did so for seven days. At the close of it, Baba appeared in a vision (dream) to him with Guru Charitra in his hand. Kaka Dixit came and asked Baba whether he would explain to Sathe what the appearance meant. He asked 'Is he to go on with a second saptaha or study of the Guru Charitra?' Baba said, 'Yes'. Baba also said, 'If the work be studied carefully, the devotee will become pure and will be benefited. The Lord will be pleased and will rescue him from samsara.'. Hearing these words, Anna Dabolkar (or Hemad Pant) thought, 'For the last seven years (1910-17), I have been serving Baba and never got a vision, and this man, (Mr. Sathe) after a week's stay at Shirdi gets his vision. Like a chataka bird, I am waiting for Baba to pour his nectar on to me and bless me with his instructions'. This was his thought. Baba read his thought at once and told him, 'Go to Shama. Get from him Rs. 15 dakshina, stay and chat with him for a while, and then come back'. Accordingly, he went to Shama and asked for Rs. 15 dakshina: Shama was a very poor man and said, 'I send my 15 namaskars'. Then Hemad Pant said, "I am asked to chat with you and listen to you", Shama then began to tell him the stories of Baba's lilas, and the foremost amongst them that he mentioned was about Mrs. Radhabai Deshmukin.

Shama said, There was a lady, an old woman, who came to Baba and who was resolved to get *mantropadesha* from Baba. Baba did not give it. She wanted

to try satyagraha. She actually began to fast saying that she would fast unto death at Shirdi unless Baba gave her upadesha. After three days of the fast, I interceded on her behalf, and requested Baba to take pity upon her and give her something. So, Baba sent for her, and told her this. "Mother, why are you subjecting yourself to unnecessary tortures and meeting death. You are my mother and I am your child. Pity me. I will tell you my story. If you listen to it, it will do you good. I had a Guru. He was a very great saint and most merciful. I served him very long indeed. Still he did not whisper any mantra into my ear. I was anxious never to leave him but to stay with him and serve him and receive some instruction from him. But he had his own method. He just got my head shaved and asked me for two pice as dakshina. I gave the same at once. If you ask 'how a perfect Guru could ask for dakshina. and yet be called desireless,' I explain to you that what he asked for was not coins. The first pice that he asked for was *Nishta* or firm faith and the second pice he wanted was *Saburi* or patience or perseverance. These two I gave him, and he was pleased. I served my Guru for 12 years. He brought me up. There was no lack of food or clothing. He was full of love. He was Love Incarnate. His love was indescribable. He loved me keenly. Rare is such a Guru. When I looked at him, I was filled with bliss, and he was in bliss. Night and day I gazed at him without thinking of hunger and thirst. Without him, I felt restless. I had no other subject to meditate on. I had nothing but the Guru to attend to He was my sole refuge. My mind was always fixed on him. That 'fixture' is the first pice - *nishta*. The second pice, *saburi*, is my waiting patiently and very long on my Guru and serving him. This *saburi* will take you across samsara. Saburi is manliness in man. It removes all sins and afflictions, gets rid of calamities in various ways, removes all fear and ultimately gives you success. Saburi is a mine of virtues and is the consort of good thought. Nishta and Saburi go together. My Guru never expected anything else from me. But he never neglected me. He always protected me. I lived with him and sometimes away from him. Still I never felt the want or absence of his love. He always protected me by his glance as a tortoise feeds its young ones. Oh, mother, my Guru never taught me any mantra. How can I give you any? Do not try to get mantra or

upadesha from anybody. Make me the sole object of your thought and actions, and you will undoubtedly attain Paramartha, the spiritual goal of life. Look at me wholeheartedly, and I shall also do the same, that is, look at you wholeheartedly. Sitting in this Masjid, I speak the truth and nothing but the truth. No sadhanas and no proficiency in sastras is necessary. Have faith and confidence in your Guru. Believe fully that the Guru is the sole Actor or Doer. Blessed is he who knows the greatness of his Guru and thinks him to be Hari, Hara, and Brahma, Trimurti Incarnate'. Shama said, 'The lady then accepted the advice'.

After hearing Shama, Anna Saheb went to the Masjid, and there he sat next to Baba, and when the Arti was going on, Baba asked him whether he went to Shama and asked for dakshina and had a chat. Dabolkar said, 'Shama sent his 15 namaskars. In the chat, he gave an account of Mrs. Radhabai Deshmukin's incident'. Baba asked, 'What is it?' Dabolkar narrated the whole story. Then Baba said, 'Wonderful is the story. Did the story strike you, and did you catch its significance?' Anna Saheb said, 'Yes. The restlessness of my mind has vanished. I have got true peace and come to know the true path'. Then Baba said, 'My method is quite unique. Remember well this one story, and it will be very useful. To get knowledge (realisation) of the self, *dhyana* (meditation) is necessary. If you practise it continuously, the *vrinis* (thoughts) will be pacified. Being quite desireless, you should meditate on the Lord who is in all the creatures, and when the mind is concentrated, the goal will be achieved. Meditate always on my formless nature, which is Knowledge Incarnate, Consciousness and Bliss. If you cannot do this, meditate on my form from top to toe as you see here night and day. As you go on doing this, your *vruttis* will be one-pointed and the distinction between the *dhyata* (meditator), *dhyana* (act of meditation) *dhyeya* (thing meditated upon) will be lost, and the meditator will be one with the consciousness and be merged in Brahman. The mother tortoise is on one bank of the river and her young ones are on the other side. She gives neither milk nor warmth to them. The mere glance gives them nutrition. The young ones do nothing but remember (meditate upon) their mother. The tortoise glance is, to the young ones, a downpour of nectar, the only source of

sustenance and happiness. Similar is the relation between the Guru 'and disciples.' Baba gave him sugarcandy and said, 'If you take this story to heart, remember it well, your state will be equally sweet. Your desires will be fulfilled and you will be happy. Meditate on the story; assimilate its spirit; then you will always remember and meditate on the Lord who will manifest himself to you.'

Now Hemad Pant was lucky enough to get a Government job for a short while, and thereafter he acted upon Baba's advice that he should serve Baba. So, he helped greatly in the management of Sai Baba's Sansthan, after 1918 or 1920-21. He looked after the accounts and helped greatly in the publication of Sai Lila Masik also. But his most important service was the writing of the first 51 or 52 chapters of the Sai Satcharitra. After his death in 1929, the 53rd chapter was added on and the complete book has been published. It is a monument of masterly, sonorous, Mahrathi verse, picturing Sai Baba's lilas and setting forth Baba's utterances and conduct in a way that would always be remembered. So, the effect of the study of Baba's lilas is the great service Hemad Pant renders. Baba himself said that a study of his lilas would put an end to ignorance and ferry people across samsara. It would make them get laya (absorption) in Sai by constantly remembering his lilas, words, and nature, especially his nature as *sarvantaryami*. Baba, as he himself declared, is the soul of all souls. Every thing is his form. By constant meditation on Baba's lilas, one can get an experience of Baba in all forms.

*Sarvabhutastham aaimaanam sarvabhatanicha aatamani eekshate
yogayuktatma sarvatra samadarsanah*

(EG.VL29)

i.e. seeing God in all creatures, and all creatures in God, by steadfast practice of yoga, the yogi has equality in viewing all. Numerous other passages of the Gita, e.g. (18)61, (5)7, 10(20), 7(9) show how important it is to get a correct view of and feeling towards all creatures proceeding from reverence, to sympathy or love and finally to identity with them. The technique to be adopted for achieving these steps is pointed out here. And this is the greatest service that Dabolkar has rendered.

Before closing the chapter, we might well note that the most important contribution is the central truth of Sai Baba's life and teaching, viz, that true religious growth is not based upon the study of the Vedas or mantras or the adoption of any yoga practice or any ritual but the recognition of love as the beginning, middle and end of all religion and that love is best and easiest when directed not to an abstraction or peripheral idea but to a concrete Guru whom you love and who loves you, and that all other '*sadhanas*' are unnecessary. There are other truths Dabolkar gained in his contact with Baba which have been revealed for the benefit of others though they have little importance.

Baba takes charge of his bhaktas even when he does not expressly use the words which he used to Dixit "Kaka why have you any cares, all cares are mine". Baba said of Dabolkar "I serve within his house" i.e. Baba agreed to look after the temporal welfare as well as the spiritual welfare of Dabolkar. The reality of this protection and guarding influence not only in his case but also in those of his relations, Dabolkar noted time and again. Having found Baba a precious gem or mine, he took with him to Baba his two sons-in-law, one after another (R. R. Samant and Galwankar) as also the rest of his family. The experiences of these two sons-in-law are found in Devotees' Experiences, Vol II, published by All India Sai Samaj, and they prove how Baba looked after their interests. Galwankar's statement is specially interesting. He stated in 1938 when he was still in official harness that Baba fixed him birth after birth on the high moral and spiritual level of truth and integrity and provided satisfactorily for all his wants. Once Baba appeared to Galwankar and asked him "What do you want?" Galwankar wanted nothing but Baba's grace and he got it. He used to get sudden spells of bliss of Baba. In the midst of his official work he would suddenly stop and for some moments he would be enjoying the bliss of Baba, His services to Sai Baba are his gift of sites, etc. and what he did when appointed as trustee of Sai Samasthan, an office which he held upto his death in 1945. The benefits to other relations are not recorded by Dabolkar or others, but some of the benefits to Dabolkar himself have been recorded. We shall just refer to one and close.

The receipt in miraculous circumstances of Baba's portrait is considered of great value. In Chapter 40 of Sai Satcharitra Dabolkar records such a favour. One Alii Mohamed, a friend of his, had many big pictures of saints including Sai Baba. To a very orthodox Mohamedan, pictures of saints are taboo. In a fit of iconoclastic zeal all the pictures he had were thrown away in the ocean near Bombay but strangely enough Sai Baba's picture which was over the door escaped notice and was not thrown away and Alii Mohamed did not want to destroy Baba's picture. He came and gave it to Dabolkar on the Holi festival of 1917. Just a few hours earlier Dabolkar had a dream or vision. A sanyasi (evidently a form taken by Baba) came to him and said that he would attend the Holi dinner as Dabolkar's guest. So while serving leaves and dishes to the entire family, a central seat with a fully served leaf was placed in expectation of the Sanyasi or Baba in any other form. None appeared and the family was just about to start their meal when steps were heard on the stairs. Dabolkar got up and met the visitor, Alii Mohammad, who then gave him the picture, promising to account for the presentation at a more convenient time later on. The picture reverently received was placed in the seat of honour, the central seat, reserved for the guest. Thus Baba kept up the promise made the previous night to attend the Holi or Shimga dinner.

That convenient occasion came only in 1926. Then Ali narrated to Dabolkar how Ali was operated on for a swelling in the leg and had to stay for months at Bombay in his brother-in-law's use. That brother-in-law told him that his (Ali's) health would improve if he threw away or destroyed all the pictures of saints kept in Ali's Bandra house. A manager was sent to carry out the order for destruction and all other pictures had been taken and thrown away or destroyed. For some unaccountable reason, Baba's picture alone escaped the fate of the rest. Ali had faith in Baba and yet did not dare to keep his portrait. So after consultation with some friends, he took it to Dabolkar as the proper recipient for the same. The presentation following the dream vision impressed Dabolkar, as a remarkable chamatkaric favour of Baba to himself.