



Debuji Zhingraji Janorkar (February 23, 1876 - December 20, 1956), popularly known as Sant Gadge Maharaj or Gadge Baba, was a saintly social reformer, a wandering mendicant who held weekly festivals with the help of his disciples across Maharashtra. His reforms and visions for villages in India is still a source of inspiration for various political parties and non-government organizations.

Maharaj was born in Shedgaon village in Amravati District of Maharashtra in a washerman's family. A public teacher, he traveled from one place to another wearing his food pan upturned on his head and carrying his trademark broom. When he entered a village, he would instantly start cleaning the gutters and roads of the village. He also told the citizens of the village that their congratulations would have to wait until his work was done. In return the villagers gave him money. From this money Maharaj built educational institutions, dharmasalas, hospitals and animal shelters. He conducted his discourses in the form of "Kirtans" in which he would emphasize values like service to humanity and compassion. During his kirtans he would educate people against blind faiths and rituals. He would use Dohas by Saint Kabir in his discourses.

He exhorted people to stop animal sacrifice as part of religious rituals and campaigned against vices such as alcohol abuse. He tried to embody the values that he preached: hard work, simple living and selfless service to the poor. He abandoned his family (wife and 3 children) to pursue this path. Maharaj met the spiritual teacher Mehar Baba several times. Mehar Baba indicated that Maharaj was one of his favorite saints and that Maharaj was on the sixth plane of consciousness. Maharaj invited Mehar Baba to Pandharpur, India, and on 6 November 1954 thousands of people had Maharaj and Mehar Baba's darshan.

Maharaj died on December 20, 1956 on his way to Amravati, on the banks of river Pedhi near Valgaon. The Government of India has started a 'Sant Gadgebaba Swachta Abhiyan' in 2000-01 in his honour. This programme awards prizes to villagers, who maintain clean villages. Currently almost all organizations built by him are functioning well. On December 20th, 1956 the Great Saint left this mortal world. Even so many years have passed since his departure there is a lot of following for him. Government of Maharashtra state also runs a village cleanliness programme named after him. University of Amravati was renamed as Sant Gadge Baba University.