

# Samarth Ramdas

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**Ramdas** was a noted 17th century saint and spiritual poet of Maharashtra. He is most remembered for his Advaita Vedanta (Non-dualism) text *Dasbodh*.<sup>[1]</sup> Samarth Ramdas was a devotee of Lord Hanuman and Lord Rama.

## Contents

- 1 Early life and background
- 2 Residences
- 3 Spiritual Development
- 4 Writings
- 5 Disciples
- 6 Shree Datta Darshan
- 7 References
- 8 Bibliography
- 9 Sources
- 10 External links

## Early life and background

The birth name of Samarth Ramdas Swami was Narayan Suryaji Thosar. He was born on Ramnavmi (in the month of ‘chaitra’) in the year – 1530 (Shalivahana era), 1608 CE, in the Jamb village, Ambad Taluka of Aurangabad District, on the banks of the river Godavari. His parents were Suryaji Pant and Ranubai and his elder brother was Gangadhar. His family, for many generations, were worshipers of Surya (Sun) and Lord Ram.

During childhood Narayan was fond of all games that involved vigorous physical activity. He loved to exercise and he was well built. He was very intelligent too. He was a very firm believer of God and stood by his moral principles. His whole persona shone with devotion for Hanuman and Lord Ram. Having devotion and strength of character, he felt compassion for the common people who were stuck in the eternal cycle of life and death. Right from his childhood he was thinking about how to relieve masses from this cycle. Marriage and settling down with his own family was not his priority. He preferred the life of a monk.

## Residences

Ramdas moved around quite a lot, and in the process, used several Ghal (Marathi: घळ), which are small caves used for meditation. The famous ones include: <sup>[2]</sup>

- Ramghal, on Sajjangad
- Morghal, at Morbag village near Sajjangad
- Tondoshi Ghal, North of Chaphal
- Taakli, near Nashik
- Chandragiri, opposite Vasantgad, near Karad
- Helwak, near Helwak village
- Shiganwadi, near Chandragiri
- Shivthar Ghal, near Mahad<sup>[3]</sup>



Samadhi of Samarth Ramdas at Sajjangad.

## Spiritual Development

At the age of 11, he attained enlightenment. He was visited by Lord Ram himself, who told him, “Go to the banks of the river Krishna and renew dharma (righteousness). The descendant of the Sisodia dynasty is going to take an avatar there. You will guide him with devotion.”

To satisfy his mother’s wishes, Narayan agreed to marry. He was 12 years of age. But as soon as he heard the word ‘Savadhan’(caution) in the wedding vows, he became cautious and ran away. He went straight to Panchavati, in Nashik district. This was where Lord Ram, his wife Sita and his brother Laxman had lived during their 14 years in exile (Vanvas). Then he went to Takli village near Nashik, where the rivers Godavari and Nandini meet, for a life of extreme devotion and spiritual study.

Devotion and worship – He would wake up before sunrise, have refreshment and bath, followed by a special exercise. This consisted of ‘Surya Namaskar’, a series of body postures adopted while praying to the Sun. Then he would stand in the river with the water waist high and chant the 13 syllable mantra of Lord Ram – “Shri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram”. 13 is considered an auspicious number. He chanted this till noon, when the Sun was directly overhead. Then he would gather food (madhukari) from only 5 houses, and offer a symbolic portion to Lord Ram before eating. In the afternoon he would go to Lord Ram’s temple in the forest and read spiritual texts extensively. He would also listen to spiritual discourses of



Hanuman

elders who visited the temple. He studied in depth Saint Valmiki's Ramayan. This is the great epic of the life of Lord Ram, one of the oldest scriptures ever written. In the evening he would attend lectures on spirituality and programs of songs praising Lord Ram, narration of his virtues, and of his stories. At night he listened to Bhajans (devotional songs). He always prayed to Lord Ram before going to sleep.

He followed this routine continuously for a period of 12 years. He uttered Lord Ram's name 13 crore (130,000,000) times. As a result of such staunch and unwavering devotion, he was gifted with 8 powers (ashta siddhis) by Lord Ram himself, who appeared and asked him to start a movement to renew dharma (righteousness). Lord Ram himself gave him the title of Samarth (most competent/capable/proficient). Everyone forgot his original name 'Narayan' and started calling him 'Samartha Ramdas'. Ramdas literally means 'the most loyal devotee of Lord Ram'.

**Spiritual Journey and Condition of the People** – In 1554 (Shalivahana era) or 1632 CE, he left the village of Takli to start his spiritual journey and start his movement. For the next 12 years, he journeyed through all corners of India. He minutely observed the condition of the people. He realized that the frequent floods and famines and the wanton and indiscriminate attacks by Muslim rulers, which were helped by a few traitorous Hindus, had destroyed society and the social life of the people. Everyone was scared and depressed. Based on these experiences he wrote 2 books named "Asmani Sultani" and "Parachakraniroopan" detailing his minute observation of the common man. These are the only two books in the whole of the Saint literature of India which describe and record the conditions of the people of those times.

Ramdas Swami was saddened to see the society of those days dependent very heavily on luck and providence. But his mission of world peace would not let him sit quietly. He knew that for a new society to take shape he would have to strive very hard for self governance, a new spiritual order to build self-confidence in the people.

Samarth Ramdas Swami chose the village of Chafal for initiating this mission and started this work in 1566 (Shalivahana era), or 1644 AD. He installed a statue of Lord Ram and started celebrating the festival of 'Birth of Lord Ram' (Ram Janmotsava) with fanfare.

His teaching of not losing patience and having faith in the face of adversities, and being fearless in difficult situations helped people to deal with dangerous conditions.

He chose Hanuman, who was extremely strong, would valiantly face enemies and emerge victorious, as a role model for the common man to combat murderous opponents. Lord Ram, the great archer, who killed Ravana and helped the Gods who were captured by him, was another role model he chose. He felt that their personalities and characteristics would be ideal for the masses to follow.

He established temples of Hanuman in towns and villages and preached to the youth the message of exercising regularly for strength. He also taught the youth to band together and fight despots and plunderers. He stressed the importance of strength along with that of knowledge, insisting that the weak could bring about no change in the world.

Emphasizing the role of hard work he said that the lazy would feel good for the time being, but it was the hard working individual who would be happy in the end.

He also highlighted the warriors' role of establishing the rule of righteousness (dharma) in running society smoothly. Their duty towards society and martyrdom for the country was given utmost importance.

While talking about the country and society, he did not ignore the family lives of individuals (duties of a grihastha). In some of his verses he stresses the importance of bringing up a healthy family and looking after the family's needs. He says that it is wise to look at the societal demands only after fulfilling the family's demands.

Samartha Ramdas Swami established many study centers all over the country, for teaching the path he advocated. These created many disciples and followers all over India.

He understood the importance of the role of women in a harmonious society. He encouraged women to participate in religious work, and gave them positions of authority. He had 18 staunch women disciples. Vennabai took care of the study center at Miraj, and Akkabai at Chafal and Sajjangad. He once strongly reprimanded an old man who was against women's participation in religious affairs by saying that everyone came from a woman's womb and those who did not understand the importance of this are not worthy of being called men. He said that respecting the role of women in society and giving them equal status was good for the growth of a healthy society.

He abhorred distinctions based on caste and creed. He preached that all human beings were equal. He stood for the abolition of social classes and for the promotion of all forms of worship.

During his last years Samartha Ramdas Swami had the feeling that his days on this earth were coming to an end. He told to his disciples: "Even if my body will not be with you, I will always remain near you through my books which will guide you in every situation".

Samartha Ramdas Swami left for his heavenly abode on the 9th day of Magh in 1603 (Shalivahana era), 1681 CE at Sajjangad.

His contribution to the world of literature is unparalleled. His books like 'Dasbodh', 'Manache Shlok', 'Atmaram', 'Manapanchak', 'Anandavanbhuvan', 'Shivakalyanaraja' and many more are very relevant even today. His followers consider them their guiding lights in today's troubled times.

## Writings

Ramdas Swami was a gifted composer. He produced considerable literature (<http://www.dasbodh.in>) in verse form in Marathi. Among his works, two compositions particularly stand out: A small book of meditations, *Shri Manāche Shlok*, advises ethical behaviour and love for God, and a large volume, *Dasbodh*, provides advice on both spiritual and practical topics. Apart from *Dasbodh*, Ramdas also wrote the *Shri Māruti Stotra*, a poem in praise of Hanuman, the *AatmaaRaam*, *11-Laghu Kavita* and *Raamayan (Marathi-Teeka)*.

His most popular composition is the Marathi Aarti to Lord Ganesh *Sukhhartā Dukhhartā Vārtā Vighnāchi*. He also composed several other Aartis such as *Satrane Uddane Hunkaar Vadani* to Lord Hanuman and *Panchanan haivahan surabhushan lila* to Lord Khandoba. The most famous book written by Samarth Ramdas, "*Dasbodh*"<sup>[4]</sup> has been translated into most of the prominent Indian languages, and available to readers all over the world. The original copy of

Dasbodh which was written by his disciple is in the Thanjavur Mutt. This mutt was the first one established by him when he came to south India for Sethu Himachal padayatra. This mutt still has his picture. The specialty of this picture is that he saw that picture in his own lifetime, contrary to the tradition of his days. Also depicted there are many special stories of him.

## Disciples

Samarth Ramdas had many disciples. Kalyan Swami worked as a writer for Ramdas, recording his songs and prayers. Ramdas tested him in many ways before giving him this responsible position. Other noteworthy disciples included

- Udhhav Swami
- Venna Swami
- Akka Bai
- Bhim Swami
- Divakar Swami
- Dinkar Swami
- Anant Buwa Ramdasi - Methavadekar
- Samruddha
- Renuka Swami

In the 20th century, Nana Dharmadhikari undertook the propagation of the philosophy of Samarth Ramdas.

## Shree Datta Darshan

Read about how Samarth Ramdas got darshan of Shree Dattatreya in Mahurgad on this link

(<http://www.shreegurudevdatamandirvakola.com/3/post/2013/08/datta-darshan-to-samarth-ramdas-swami.html>). This has been translated to English from the book Kardalivan: Ek Anubhuti by Prof. Kshitij Patukle.

## References

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3. ^ "A History of the Maratha People" (<http://www.archive.org/details/historyofmaratha01kincooft>) 1. London: Oxford University Press. 1918. pp. 183–194.
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- "Tryambak Shankar Shejwalkar Nivadak Lekhsangrah" by T S Shejwalkar (collection- H V Mote, Introduction- G D Khanolkar)

## External links

- 'Largest Database of RAMDASI SAMPRADAYA' containing ALL literature of Samarth Ramdas (<http://www.dasbodh.com>)

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Categories: Marathi-language writers | Hindu saints | 1608 births | 1681 deaths | People from Jalna district | Marathi poets | Hindu writers

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