

10. The life of Samartha Raamadhas

IN a place called Baadar in the Aurangabad district of Mahaaraashtra, a son was born to a couple highly devoted to God. He was named Naaraayana. He grew up as a naughty boy, neglecting his studies and quarrelling with other children. At the age of eight years, he lost his father. His mother Ramaa Dhevi, found it difficult to control her mischievous and delinquent son. Her relatives and neighbours advised her to get him married so that he might realise his responsibilities and change for the better.

Although the boy was only 13 years old and too young for marriage, his mother yielded to the persuasions of others and arranged for his marriage. At the time of the wedding, a screen of thick cloth was held in-between the bride and bridegroom, according to the prevailing custom, and the *purohiths* (priests) removed the curtain to hand over the *Mangala Suuthram* (the sacred thread of wedlock) to the bridegroom for him to tie it round the bride's neck. Lo and behold! The bridegroom had disappeared behind the curtain, without anybody's notice. A thorough search was made to trace him out, but in vain. So, the marriage could not be performed.

Hanumaan's blessings showered on Raamadhas

The boy Naaraayana, who had escaped from the marriage, hall, ultimately reached a place called Nasik near the source of the sacred river Godhaavari. He stayed there for sometime and then moved to a nearby mountain called 'Chithrakoota' which is considered holy, because Lord Raama lived there for nearly 12 years. There he selected an exquisitely beautiful spot by name Panchavati. The boy was enraptured by the grandeur of the scenery of the place, and its sanctity, associated with the stay of Lord Raama there during his exile, sent thrills of ecstasy in Naaraayana. He was always immersed in the contemplation of Lord Raama.

What was the cause for the naughty boy turning into a pious young man? Apart from the fact that his latent good *Samskaaras* (accumulated tendencies) were aroused by the sudden shock of the 'prospect of being saddled with the heavy responsibilities of married life, the boy, during his journey to Nasik, entered a famous Hanumaan temple enroute, and wholeheartedly prayed to the Deity to bless him with all the noble qualities for which Hanumaan was renowned. And he had an indication of his prayer being answered by way of gentle movement of the idol transmitting spiritual vibrations in the direction of the boy.

After 12 years of intense penance at Panchavati, Naaraayana gained the three-fold realisation of Lord Raama, as did Hanumaan, namely, when he had body consciousness, he was the servant and Raama the Master, when he was conscious of his being a *Jeeva* (individual soul) he was a part of Raama (*Visishtaadhvaitha*) and when he was aware of his being the *Aathma* he and Raama were one (*Adhvaitha* or non-dualism).

Raamadhas enters the arena of social service

After this realisation, he returned to Nasik from Panchavati. While there, he came to know that the country was in the grip of a severe famine. Then he began to reflect that to spend his time thinking of only his own liberation, when all his countrymen were suffering due to famine, amounted to extreme selfishness. So, he coined the *slogan*, "*Dhil me Raam, Haath me Kaam*" (Raama in the heart, and work in the hand), and entered the arena of social service with all his energy and zeal, giving to himself and his band of dedicated workers mottoes such as: "*Maamava seva* (service to man) is *Maadhava seva* (service to God)" and "*Graama seva* (service to the

villages) is *Raama seva* (service to Raama)." He filled the tank of his heart with the holy water of *Raama naam* (Raama's name) which flowed through the top of his hands to quench the thirst of the multitudes of his countrymen.

Proceeding thus from village to village, doing social work, coupled with chanting of *Raama naam*, Naaraayana finally reached Raameshvaram at the southern tip of the Indian peninsula. From there he went to the pilgrim centres of Thirupathi (where he had the *darshan* of Lord Venkateshvara) and Hampi (where he worshipped Lord Viruupaaksha). Ultimately he returned to Nasik. On the way to Nasik, he saw Saint Thukaaraam, who was singing the glories of Raama so melodiously that a large number of people including Shivaaji, the ruler of Maharashtra, were attracted to him. As Shivaaji listened to Thukaaraam, and told him about his decision to give up his kingdom and to devote himself fully and whole-heartedly to the pursuit of the spiritual path, Thukaaraam admonished Shivaaji for his narrow-minded view of spirituality and exhorted him to consider duty as God and work as worship. Thereupon Shivaaji prayed to Thukaaraam to give him initiation. Thukaaraam declined saying, "Raamadhas is your *Guru*, not I, so you have to receive initiation only from him." Rather disappointed, Shivaaji returned to his capital.

Shivaaji's offer to Raamadhas

When Shivaaji came to know that Naaraayana alias Raamadhas was in Nasik, he sent his Ministers and other high dignitaries to invite Raamadhas to the royal court with a band of music and other traditional honours befitting a highly distinguished personage. When Raamadhas arrived, the king received him with due honours and reverence, arranged for his stay in the palace itself, and after washing his feet, he sprinkled the holy washings on his own head and submitted to him in all humility: "O revered Master! From this moment this kingdom belongs to you; and I too, am yours.

Thereupon Raamadhas replied, "My son, I am an ascetic who has renounced everything. I have neither the right nor the desire for your limited kingdom. God's kingdom is unlimited. The goal of my life is to help every one to reach that unlimited kingdom of God. So I don't want this kingdom of yours. I am now coronating you as the ruler of this kingdom which you have offered to me. From now onwards, you will be king with a difference. You should consider that the kingdom really belongs to God and that you are only "His instrument or trustee administering the kingdom on His behalf."

From Raamadhas to Samartha Raamadhas

Since Raamadhas had the extraordinary capacity to do many great things, he came to be known as Samartha Raamadhas, the appellation Samartha meaning a man of versatile skills. There is an episode in his life which describes the context in which the title of "Samartha" was conferred on him. He used to dress himself and move about like *Kodhandapaani* (Raama armed with his bow and arrows).

Once when he was walking along the banks of the Godhavari in this dress, some *Brahmanas* who were taking bath there questioned him whether he belonged to the community of Koyas (hunters belonging to a hill tribe were called Koyas). Raamadhas told them that he was Raamadhas (a servant of Raama) and not a Koya. Thereupon, they questioned him why he was dressed and equipped with bow and arrows like Raama if he was only a servant of Raama. They heckled him saying, "What is the use of merely trying to imitate Kodhandapaani in appearance only? Are you capable of wielding the bow and arrows as Raama did?" Just then a bird was

flying fast at a great height across the sky above their heads. The Brahmanas pointed the bird to Raamadhas and asked him whether he could shoot that bird. With Rama's name on his lips, Raamadhas immediately aimed an arrow at the flying bird and brought it down right in front of the *Brahmanas*. Seeing the dead bird, the *Brahmanas* accused Raamadhas saying, "There is no harmony of thought, word and deed in you and therefore you are a *dhuraathma* (a wicked person); you chant Raama's name and at the same time you have committed the sin of killing an innocent bird, to show off your skill." When Raamadhas replied that he shot the bird at their instance only, they remonstrated, saying, "If we ask you to eat grass, will you do so? Don't you have your own independent thinking or discrimination?" Then Raamadhas gently replied, "Sirs, past is past. Kindly tell me what I should do now?"

Raamadhas revives a dead bird

They asked him to repent for his sin. Raamadhas promptly closed his eyes and prayed to God wholeheartedly, repenting for his sin and asking for His forgiveness. Then he opened his eyes and pointed out to the *Brahmanas* that the dead bird had not regained life, in spite of his repentance. The *Brahmanas* said reprovingly, "What a madcap you are! Repentance cannot, undo what you have done; but its purpose is to enable you to make up your mind not to repeat such misdeeds in future." "That is no repentance in my humble view," countered Raamadhas, "God and His name are so powerful that if we pray sincerely, His grace will bring the bird back to life." So saying, he picked up the dead bird, hugged it to his bosom, and with tears flowing down his cheeks, he wholeheartedly prayed, "O Raama, if I have been chanting your name with all my mind, heart and soul and if it is a fact that I have killed this bird out of ignorance and not with an intent to kill, may your grace either revive this dead bird, or take away my life also along with that of the bird." As he concluded his prayer, the bird fluttered in his hands. Then he opened his eyes, thanked the Almighty and released the bird into the sky. Astonished at this miracle, the *Brahmanas* exclaimed in one voice, "Revered sir, forgive us for not recognising your greatness. Since you have the capacity to kill a flying bird with a single arrow, and also the capacity to revive the dead bird, you will hereafter be known by the worthy name of 'Samartha Raamadhas.'

Raamadhas' visit to Pandaripuram

After this, Raamadhas visited Pandaripuram where he was an eye-witness to the ideal way in which a man by name Pundareeka served his parents as veritable gods, making Lord Paanduranga Himself wait in front of his house standing on a pair of bricks, till he completed his service to his parents.

Then he visited Shivaaji and gave him three things as mementos to guide him in his royal duties one, a coconut to remind him that just as our intention in buying a coconut is to consume the white kernel inside, so also the purpose of owning and administering the kingdom is that the king himself should lead a *saathvik* life and also to ensure that the *saathvik* quality prevails in his kingdom; second, a handful of earth to remind the king and through him his subjects, about the sanctity of Bhaarath, their motherland; third, a pair of bricks to symbolise that just as bricks are used to construct houses for the safety of the inmates, the king should use his powers to protect the people and promote their welfare and progress.

Raamadhas' re-union with his mother

At this time the memory of Pundareeka's devoted service to his parents at Pandaripuram was revived in Raamadhas mind and he hastened back home with the idea of serving his aged

mother. When he reached home, his old mother could not recognise him, particularly because of his long beard and strange dress. He told her that he was her son, Naaraayana, who was popularly known as Samartha Raamadhas. Thereupon, his mother exclaimed ecstatically, "O my dear son, I have been hearing so much about Samartha Raamadhas and have been eager to see him for a long time. But I never knew that it is the popular name of my son, Naaraayana. I am proud of you and thank the Lord for making me the mother of such a great one. My life is fulfilled." So saying she breathed her last on her son's lap.

Raamadhas duly performed the obsequies of his mother. Shortly thereafter, he heard about Sivaji's death in A.D 1680 (just six years after he was coronated by Raamadhas in A.D 1674). He went to the King's capital, installed Sivaji's son as the king and blessed him so that he might rule the kingdom, following the footsteps of his noble father.

Discourse on 19-3-1993, at Thrayee Brindhaavan, when Bhagavaan gave a detailed account of the life of Samartha Raamadhas, the great Mahaaraashtra saint.