

DASABODHA

[A work of Sri Samartha Ramadasa]

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Dasabodha is one of the important works of Sri Samartha Ramadasa, a saint of Maharashtra and the spiritual teacher of Shivaji. Among his remaining works the notable ones are *Karunashtaken*, *Manache Sloka* and *Janasvabhavagosanvi*. Samartha Ramadasa is held in high respect and his name is taken with awe even now. It is traditionally believed that he had a great hand in the building of the Maharatta empire under Shivaji. Under his guidance and inspiration Shivaji faced many a hazardous task with fortitude and presence of mind which qualities of head and heart in him stand as burning examples in the annals of history. When more than once Shivaji wanted to lay down the office of rulership and retire to live as a simple disciple of Ramadasa, the latter commanded that he should fight and firmly establish the kingdom and that, that was the discipline he prescribed for Shivaji's spiritual welfare. India today knows fully well how timely and valuable was this advice. Some portions of this book contain this advice given to Shivaji. (xviii. 6.)

The life of Samartha Ramadasa is wonderful. As a boy of twelve he developed great dispassion for the world and ran away from the house as the guardians were trying to bind him to the world by way of wedlock. The next twelve years of his life were spent in tapasya at a place called Takali. Not much is known about his struggles and trials about this period nor about the succeeding twelve years which he spent in visiting places of pilgrimage throughout the length and breadth of the country. After this great wandering he came and settled on the banks of the Krishna. Three years later Ramadasa obtained an image of Sri Rama from the deep places of the Krishna river at Angapur and a year later consecrated a temple to Sri Rama at Chaphala and worshipped Him. It was after this that he came in contact with Shivaji and events moved on rapidly

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culminating not only in the establishment of a strong embankment in the form of the Maharatta kingdom to resist the fanatical furies of the Mughal emperors but also in the wide spiritual ministry of Ramadasa.

Ramadasa was an Advaitin in outlook but that did not blind him to the realities of the world. He was fully conscious of the degradation of the people especially the Brahmins who had fallen from the ideal and were taking to occupations not fitting with the purity and spirituality of a Brahmin. His patience seems, however, to have been lost when the so-called wise of the race voluntarily embraced other religions. (xiv.7.29-40.) It was in order to revive the ancient religion therefore that he dedicated the rest of his life.

The *Dasabodha* consists of twenty sections. Each section is termed a dasaka as it contains ten chapters, called samasas. The whole book is written in the form of prose-verse but it never becomes commonplace. The similes are homely yet forceful, the language is simple and the style terse. It is a treatise on the Advaita Vedanta in the Marathi language and is widely read. His life was a shining example of the truths of Vedanta, for years he did not have a roof for shelter and even when he had he seemed to have rarely made use of it. Utterly dependent on the Lord, and the welfare of the people always at heart he roamed from place to place to provide guidance and infuse discrimination in them about the values of life. He deals with a wide range of subjects on the spiritual life: true and false knowledge, necessity of a Guru, characteristics of a Guru, the qualifications of a true disciple, Maya, necessity of spiritual disciplines, bhakti and liberation.

He extols the value of the human body in as much as it forms the vehicle for the liberation of the soul from transmigration. Man can make or mar his own fate; by the human body alone many have become rishis, munis and attained God-realisation through different paths. But, says Ramadasa, all this is possible when the body is strong, free from disease and deformities; so when yet the body is strong it should be utilised in the service of God. The animals cannot aspire for liberation because they have not the sense of the values of life; all their energy is consumed in self-preservation and satisfaction of their instincts which are not high.

Dasabodha stresses the importance of cultivation of virtuous habits for one who aspires for liberation; this section of the book gives a piece of worldly advice too which cannot be followed but with profit both in one's spiritual and secular life. 'One who takes pleasure in self-aggrandisement, one who undertakes to do a work beyond his capacity, one who has neither learning nor wealth but still remains proud, one who earns wealth by foul means are all ignorant,' says Ramadasa. These along with other

drawbacks which he enumerates should be given up and the positive helpful qualities are to be assiduously cultivated, by a seeker of a higher life is the contention of Ramadasa, in short without a good grounding in moral life, spiritual life is an impossibility is his view.

Following the Rishis of old he draws a sharp line of demarcation between what real knowledge is, and what is considered normally as knowledge. The difference between the two is that the former liberates man whereas the latter binds him to this world more and more. The knowledge of the different sciences and dexterity in using that knowledge to fulfil our worldly ambitions is not real knowledge, it only whets our desire to excel in worldly goods. As against this is posited the knowledge of the Atman, the Ever-Eternal Substance, the Indwelling Spirit in all, which destroys ignorance and makes man omniscient. And this is not to be attained by mere study of the Vedas but by the grace of a Guru.

Ramadasa is never tired of stressing the necessity of a Guru and his grace for the realisation of God. Many of the chapters of this book are exclusively devoted to impress this idea on the mind of the readers and whenever he speaks of Brahman and realisation he puts this idea in the forefront. So definite is he about the efficacy of the Guru's grace that he holds it more covetable than the knowledge of all the Vedas and Vedanta, when he says:

'I know neither Sanskrit nor Prakrit but by the grace of my Guru I can dispense with the study of the Vedas and all kinds of learning.'(v.6. 33-42.)

The question that troubles a young mind seems to be, 'Why one should give up the comforts of the world which are here and now and to aspire after something which is unknown and indefinite?' Ramadasa gives the reply to this. True, that this seems to be real but why not look around and see where the so-called youth, beauty and vigour, the wealth and the people whom we loved have gone. If they were real why should they disappear, if they are unreal then why take birth, which is fraught with danger, with trials, with trepidations and again with the deadly death. Man should therefore try to avoid this cycle of birth and death by realising the nature of his own Self. Nothing else, says Ramadasa, can free you from this bondage.

Again to cut at the root of the argument that what is perceived by the senses is more tangible than anything else, Ramadasa brings in the experience of a man in the desert who runs after the water in the mirage, the example of the man who obtained wealth in his dreams, and the

magic world of the magician. If the senses were infallible in their judgement why does man see water where it is not, see wealth where it is absent, see a whole world of impossibilities. If then the senses cannot be depended upon fully, how can it be judged which of its experiences are true and which false; as the wealth which was real during the dream stage has no reality during the waking stage, all this that we see have only a temporary existence; refuse to have anything to do with it and think of the One reality, the Atman.

Whence this illusion is the question that engages the mind! It is because the unreal and the real have got mixed up like milk and water that we see everything as real and it requires intuition like the instinct of the proverbial swan to separate the two, to reject the unreal and to accept the real. The unreal shines as real because of the substratum on which it is projected is real. Leaving out the unreal one should attain the real and that real is One, without a second and that is one's own Self. How is this to be done? By belief in the words of the Guru, by hearing constantly about God, by devotion to God and finally by self surrender, says Ramadasa.

Dasabodha deals also with the question of the necessity of 'upasana', worship and 'Kirtan'. It is not fair for one who has not gone beyond the body idea to ask this question. It is true that everything is illusion but until you have experienced it yourself you have to do worship, do upasana, do kirtan and in every other way remember God. Otherwise you will worship your own body more, your own patrons in worldly goods you will like to propitiate more and get entangled the more in the world. If you can do any act for the sake of keeping this body why should you only neglect your worship of God, who is the patron of your patrons, nay the life of your life. Even by taking recourse to this saguna aspect of Brahman you can reach the Nirguna Brahman. Ramadasa though a staunch Advaitin worshipped Sri Rama and felt proud in calling himself His servant. Bhakti according to him is not antagonistic to the path of Advaita, self-surrender is not degradation but an elevation of the mind to the level of the Atman by forgetting the body and even the ego.

Sravaṇa, hearing, plays a very important part in our spiritual lives, says Ramadasa. Sravana should be constantly adhered to. By sravana the attraction for worldly objects gets feeble, discrimination awakens, infatuation disappears and love of God sprouts forth. Without hearing about God we cannot understand and this hearing should be through the lips of a proper person. That person is the Guru who will instruct the disciple according to his temperament and tendencies. Everything in its place is sweet; one who likes the worship of God with form should not be

asked to cultivate devotion to His formless aspect, neither one who takes naturally to the formless aspect be forced to go through the disciplines of the saguna aspect.

The idea that meditation is imagination seems to have been prevalent even during those days and Ramadasa faces this accusation boldly and says, 'The world itself is an imagination and out of this world you get only disillusionment at the end, then why not try better imagination? Imagine about God, about Brahman; by thinking constantly good thoughts, bad thoughts vanish from the mind, similarly by thinking about God this world will glide away giving place to the mightiest power, God.'

Ramadasa, however, says that without attaining Brahman, without knowing one's own Nature, it is futile to think that one would get liberation. Brahman is all that exists, all the variety that we see is only due to Maya. Brahman cannot be compared, yet if we have to illustrate we can say it is like the *akasha*, all-pervading but there the comparison ends for the *akasha* is created and destructible whereas Brahman always exists. It is the Only Reality in which all gods, even Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara are born. It is very near us and at the same time very far. In this way he goes on to give illustrations most of which we come across in the Upanishads and the Gita.

Dasabodha, therefore, is in short, a compendium of the truths of Vedanta which carries behind it the weight of the supreme realisations of the author. Being written in the language of the people it has been a tremendous force in the revival of the *Ancient Religion*. The need of such a work at that time was possibly intensely felt as the Brahmins had deprived the other castes from having access to the Vedas and its necessity still continues as the zeal for learning Sanskrit has died out in the country. As it has a direct appeal to the mind and also a direct method of approach to the subject, it deserves to be more widely read than afore by those who place the spiritual life on a higher pedestal than the normal life. May Sri Rama who guided Ramadasa lead us to right understanding.