

BIOGRAPHY OF SHRI RAMAKANT MAHARAJ

“Listen to me! The entire world is a projection of your spontaneous invisible, anonymous unidentifiable presence, which cannot be defined in words.”

Parampoojya Sadguru Shri Ramakant Maharaj had constantly been hammering this Ultimate Truth and guiding us in trying to identify our Real Identify, ‘I AM THAT’.

The peaceful, composed, ever smiling personality, clad in white Kurta, pyjama and a Nehru cap, our great reverend master, Shri Ramakant Maharaj, an adherent dedicated disciple of the great Shri Nisargadatta Maharaj spent 19 years with him. A renowned spiritual Guru and a teacher of Non-duality or (Advaita Vedanta), Shri Ramakant Maharaj belonged to the Inchegiri lineage of Navnath Sampradaya which emphasized on Bhakti, Dnyan and Vairagya.

The worldly life of a Saint, though insignificant from his point of view, serves as a guiding force and gives inspiration to his devotees. Shri Maharaj says, “Who is dying? Who is living? Just self-enquire. Nobody is dying, Nobody is taking birth.”

To write about Sadguru’s life is really an uphill task. In Swami Vivekananda’s words, “It is impossible for puny words to do full justice to my Sadguru’s life.” Being faced with same difficulty an attempt is being made to narrate in short the material past life of Sadguru Shri Ramakant Maharaj.

Childhood

Shri Maharaj was born in Wadia Hospital in Mumbai on 8th July 1941. He spent his early childhood in Gadgesakal wadi in Phondaghat, a beautiful small village in Konkan, the most beautiful and God-gifted land between the Sahyadri (Western Ghats) and the Arabian Sea at western coastline of India, also known as ‘little slice of paradise’ of Maharashtra. His full name was Ramakant Pandurang Sawant. His father was Pandurang and mother was Satyabhama. His mother was a pious, hardworking, loveable lady. Shri Maharaj was born after 10 years, after his two sisters. Naturally, the arrival of the son was an occasion of celebration for everyone. The joy of the mother knew no bounds.

Shri Maharaj inherited his love for spirituality from his grandparents. They were ardent devotees of Lord Hanuman. The idol that they worshipped exists even today in the altar.

The hardships in his life have carved out the saint in Shri Maharaj just like that of any other great personality.

His grandparents and his father worked in a mill in Mumbai. Later due to the Mill Workers Strike, many mills were closed and they were forced to return to their native place. As a result their financial condition got disturbed and started worsening day by day. His Mother too became terminally ill. But she did not receive proper medical treatment due to the prevailing superstitious practices of that time. Even at that early age, he detested those practices. Once out of rage he questioned the Mantrik that, "How would these offerings of live poultry help to cure my mother?" He told his grandmother to stop these practices. But destiny couldn't be changed.

He was only 7 years old when he lost his mother. It was a terrible loss for Shri Maharaj. It left a great impact on his tender mind as if it was the end of his childhood.

Education

Shri Maharaj completed his Primary education in Mumbai and secondary education in Phondaghat. His secondary education was highly troublesome. Meagre facilities were provided to him and poor financial condition added to the woes. He had to walk down 3 km barefoot in the blazing sun to reach the school. He had to work in the fields, till the land, collect firewood and then manage studies if at all he got time. With all these adversities, he completed his education till 11th Std (Then SSC). He couldn't clear his English Subject. After this he came to Mumbai. Though he had a zest for higher studies he couldn't continue his education due to low scores. He couldn't get a job either. In spite of all this he had strong faith in God and had a strong hope that something better will be churned out of his life. He did some odd jobs. He had to do household chores too.

Life has many ways of testing a persons will, either by having nothing happen at all or by having everything happen all at once. Differences of opinion arose between his parents (father, stepmother) and him. Due to unavoidable circumstances, without compromising on his ideals, he had to take the decision of leaving his house. He started living at Tardeo, Mumbai with his elder sister whom he called Akka and brother-in-law, whom he called Anna.

Akka and Anna was a loving couple. They too, were not so financially well to do and lived in a small house, but they had large hearts. Living with them changed the course of his life. Anna was a disciple of Shri. Kadsiddheshwar Swami. Due to spiritual disenchantment, he had been away from home for 2-3 years and had recently returned to his family resulting in frail financial conditions. In spite of this, it was decided that Shri. Maharaj should join Harshe Classes for English. Shri Maharaj was aware of the situation and

accepted all odd jobs that he could. He got a job in a shop in Girgaon. At times he even had to do portorage for the shop owner.

But a diamond is a chunk of coal that did well under pressure. It is during such hard times that a 'Hero' within an individual is revealed.

At Sadguru's feet

In all these times of turmoil, Shri Maharaj did not lose his patience. He believed in 'Work is Worship.' Though he struggled to do his best, he wasn't able to find a perfect path. But when the future was looking bleak, there arose a ray of hope. That auspicious day dawned when he was to meet his Sadguru and get blessed for his lifetime. That day Shri Shewale, a neighbour from his native place, had arrived at Anna's house. Maharaj was at home as he had no job at that time. Shri Shewale said to him, "As you are at home, come with me to my Sadguru, listen to his discourses and enjoy the Bhajans. Give a try. If you like, then come regularly." These words were to give a perpetual turn to Maharaj's tough journey. He visited Shri Nisargadatta Maharaj at Khetwadi.

Sadguru Shri Nisargadatta Maharaj's discourses were not easily comprehensible to a newbie. Maharaj was no exception to it. But something sparked in him and he started visiting Sadguru's ashram regularly. He would sit in a corner, listen to the discourse, do the bhajans and return home. This routine continued till 2nd October 1962, when Shri Maharaj was initiated by Sadguru Shri Nisargadatta Maharaj.

A 'Diety' [Sadguru] in the making had manifested as a devotee. [Maharaj had revealed his mind a day before getting admitted in the hospital. 'A guru can identify the perfect stone to be chiselled into a perfect Sculpture.'] Shri Sadguru had realised the potential in Shri Maharaj and was attracted to this forlorn, quiet, virtuous youth. He used to ask some of his disciples in high posts to search a job for him. When he learnt that Shri Maharaj had just completed his SSC, he said, "Don't come here to just play the cymbals. I don't aspire for such devotion. Get well educated, like that of Arvind Ghosh. What would a pauper donate? Learn and grow big, earn well." Maharaj was left perplexed Sadguru had compared him to Arvind Ghosh, a great philosopher and yogi.

One day Sadguru asked his disciple, Shri Anna Phadol, the Registrar of the prestigious Elphinstone College to grant him admission in his college. This left Anna Phadol in a fix as Maharaj had secured only 40% in SSC whereas the cut-off percentage for admission there was 60%. But those were the Guru's words. He took the other colleagues into confidence and sought admission for Maharaj. But Shri Maharaj had to sign a bond stating that if he couldn't clear the First Year examination, his admission would stand

cancelled. Maharaj was also determined for his studies. At times due to lack of place and no electricity, he studied sitting under the lamps of Mumbai Central railway station. He put all his efforts and passed his F.Y.B.A. After that there was no looking back.

Keep studying till the age of 40. These words of Sadguru kept ringing in his ears. He later not only completed his B.A. but also studied law. He completed his M.A. (Part-II) and L.L.B. after marriage. After his B.A., he had got a good job in Dena Bank. To complete his education, he worked at various places in different mills, then a laundry, in a shop, in the Industrial court, at the telephone exchange, at Sachivalaya and finally in Dena Bank from where he retired as a Manager in the year 2000. After getting initiated in 1962, he composed many abhangs. At that time he was working in the Telephone exchange. He used to sit in the tents in the afternoon and pen down his poetic thoughts that reflected his conviction in Guruvachan and Gurubhakti as well as Self-realisation that he achieved in this short period.

Maharaj got married to Anvita on 9th May 1971. Now his responsibilities had increased as he had to manage his job education and also the family. But he got a perfect partner in Anvita who supported him, in his family as well as spiritual journey. She was a hardworking, pious lady who too got initiated by Shri Nisargadatta Maharaj. She dutifully and efficiently managed the household chores and her career without ignoring the development of their children.

Amit, their first son was born in 1973 and Nishad was born in 1976. Both of them got initiated from Sadguru Shri Ranjit Maharaj. Amit is presently working as Chief of Medical Physics in Department of Radiation Oncology in University of Maryland, Baltimore, U.S.A.. Nishad is a Global Human Resource Director at Portescap, a U.S. multinational into manufacturing of high precision miniature motors. Both their daughters-in-law, Farzana and Gauri are talented, dutiful and amiable and get involved in the Sampradaya celebrations. In 2016, When Maharaj visited U.S.A., Satsangs were arranged in Silverspring and Columbia. Many foreign disciples gathered to collect the nectar of his discourses arranged at Amit's home. At times there were conversations in form of question and answers. Amit has a 18-month-old daughter Reva and Nishad has a 11-year-old son, Aarav. Aarav was the fortunate one to have received the Naam mantra from Shri. Maharaj when he was in the hospital during his final illness.

Maharaj fulfilled all his obligations to his family and the society still staying detached from the world just like a lotus leaf in water, totally engrossed in his Gurubhakti. Throughout, he was constantly supported by the better half

Anvita (Aai) who was his strength and pillar of support. Even today she is engrossed in his work.

Sadhak (An Ideal Seeker)

No one can cross over to the other shore without a Guru. This was true for Maharaj too. Due to his unflinching faith in his Sadguru, he started visualising the Parmatma, the Ultimate Truth in him. The powerful teachings of Shri Nisargadatta Maharaj revolutionised Maharaj's life. Maharaj was progressing educationally as well as spiritually.

Sadguru would ask him to read the Dasbodh or play tabla or harmonium. He had love and affection for Maharaj just like his own son. Once he visited Maharaj's house and took him to the market for shopping. There he bought a watch for his son and another one for Maharaj. He also opened a bank account for him. Sadguru was constantly showering his love and blessings just like that of a mother. Akka and Anna were also overjoyed with this.

Maharaj stayed with Akka and Anna for few months after marriage and then returned to his old house at Lalbaug. Later, in 1977 he shifted to Borivali in a 2 BHK flat. He invited Sadguru Shri Nisargadatta Maharaj for the inauguration and house warming ceremony. A small celebration with bhajan and discourse by Shri Sadguru was organised in presence of all fellow devotees. Earlier Sadguru had given him his own photo and some others too and said, "Put them on the altar when you buy a big house." Now the day had dawned. Sadgurus words had turned into reality. Travelling from Borivali to Khetwadi regularly, managing the job became a bit difficult task. His everyday visits to the Khetwadi Ashram reduced to every Thursday and Sunday.

The loss of Sadguru

Eventually Sadguru Shri Nisargadatta Maharaj suffered from an incurable disease. Finally, Sadguru dropped his material body on 8 September 1981. It was like a heaven-fall to all the devotees, especially Maharaj whom Sadguru had caressed like a mother.

After nirvana(departure) of Sadguru Shri Nisargadatta Maharaj, Sadguru Shri Ranjit Maharaj assumed the role of Sadguru. He too was fond of Shri Ramakant Maharaj. He would sit till late night with Ramakant Maharaj after the other devotees left on completion of the Sampradayik Bhajans. He would discuss spiritual matters for long. Ranjit Maharaj would later himself serve food to him from the tiffin that he had ordered. How Blessed he was!

Often Ramakant Maharaj would stress in his discourses that “I consider myself the richest man in this world as I was associated with two great saints and got love and affection from both of them.”

Ranjit Maharaj appreciated Shri Maharaj’s direct and simple style of giving discourses during the Sampradayik Celebrations. Shri Maharaj travelled with Shri Ranjit Maharaj to Pathri and Bagewadi and other places for Saptah celebrations. As a result his Bhakti and involvement blossomed further.

Earlier on 25 January 1979, Sadguru Shri Nisargadatta Maharaj and some other devotees had visited the residence of Shri Anna Phadol for his house warming ceremony at Nashik. At that time, on request of his other devotee, Shri Baburao Jagtap, Sadguru Maharaj happened to visit his grape farms (Jagtap Mala). He liked the place very much and stated that “Celebrate this day every year like that of Diwali festival. Some great spiritual activities are to happen here.”

Sadguru’s words could never be false. The present Ranjit ashram – Dnyan Bhakti Kendra, Nashik Road, bubbling with activities stands at the same place. Since then, Shri. Baburao Jagtap celebrated this day every year without fail. Later, on the request of the devotees Shri Ranjit Maharaj also started attending this celebration. From 1979 to 2000, Baburao Jagtap performed these celebrations at his home itself. After some years, it was unanimously decided that this programme to be celebrated as a 3-day Annual Saptah during April – May. The expenses of the celebration are borne by the Jagtap family.

The devotee clan of Shri Ranjit Maharaj was increasing day by day in Nashik. But there was no place where they could come together for a Satsang. Shri Ramakant Maharaj purchased a 4 room flat at Jagtapmala, Nashik road and made it open for the daily Sampradayik rituals, especially for comfortable accommodation of sadguru Shri Ranjit Maharaj and eventually other devotees who would gather for the Saptah celebrations.

The Shreefal Tula (Function wherein Maharaj was Physically weighed in a balance containing coconuts on other side) of Ranjit Maharaj was accomplished whole heartedly with great pomp, glory and devotion on 15 May 2000 at this place. During that time Ramakant Maharaj had purchased the Row House in front of the place where now the Ashram exists, for convenience of Shri Ranjit Maharaj and easy accessibility for other devotees.

But destiny had planned something else. On 15 November 2000 Shri Ranjit Maharaj left his material body. This was another great loss to Maharaj as well as other devotees.

The seat of Sadguru

Many devotees expressed their desires to Shri Maharaj to initiate them. But he was reluctant to accept this role. He used to direct them to one of his accomplished Gurubandhus.

Some devotees however insisted on getting initiated from him. His Sadguru himself strongly willed that Shree Maharaj bless his devotees by giving the Naam mantra and spread true knowledge throughout the world. Finally in 2002 he assumed the role of Sadguru.

Shri Maharaj completely devoted himself for his Sadguru work. Daily bhajans began at Ranjit ashram. Shri Maharaj would visit Krishna Jagtap at his CIDCO Residence and Bhakti flourished in Ranjit ashram. Maharaj would give discourses on Dasbodh, Eknathi Bhagwat, etc. Devotees from all over Maharashtra, rather all over India started pouring in for seeking guidance. Seekers from abroad (USA, UK, Germany, Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Russia, France, etc.) too started visiting him for discussion and spiritual guidance and sought initiation from him. Shri Maharaj would always say, "Only Dhyana and Bhajan can control your mind. Do it seriously." "Your selfless innocent Gurubhakti is your great asset." "Surrender completely." "You are not aware of your presence. Your presence is beyond the sky."

He would repeatedly hammer his Sadguru's quote which is the essence of all spirituality. "Except your selfless self, there is no God, no Brahman, no Atman, no Parmatman, no Master." About this material body, he would quote, "You are not the body. You were not the body. You are not going to remain the body. You are unborn."

Books

Maharaj always felt that it was his duty to share his knowledge that he received from his two gurus, Sadguru Shri Nisargadatta Maharaj and Sadguru Shri Ranjit Maharaj. Shri Maharaj's radical teachings and repeated hammerings during his discourses in his simple lucid language be it Marathi or English are readily fathomable. He reached out to his disciples in every possible way he could, be it daily discourses during Saptah celebrations, or conversations with the inquisitive seekers or chat over skype or be it short message over the mobile phone.

Some of the short message (SMS) in English and Marathi sent by him every morning from 2007 to 2009 are compiled into a small booklet 'Amrutdhara' through which he emphasized the importance of Dhyana, Bhakti, Dnyana and Namsmaran. The compilation was done by Shri Vijay Thorat and Smt. Smita Thorat with invaluable help of Varsha Patil-Chavan and was published on

15th July 2011 on the occasion of Guru Purnima. Similarly, 'Dnyanamrut' a booklet comprising of quotes by Shri Maharaj selected from his discourses in Marathi was compiled by Mrs. Bindutai Gurav on his 75th birth anniversary.

His 21 selected savoury talks on Dasbodh in Marathi have been compiled into 'Atmatnatmaviveka' an enchanting treat to the seekers by Shri. Dr Dhiraj Sarvadnya. The talks were transcribed by Smt. Varsha Patil – Chavan from the cassettes recordings of Shri Maharaj.

An English couple, Ann and Charles Shaw from England had long discussion with Shri Maharaj on Self Enquiry, Self Knowledge and Self Realization. They recorded his teachings and later transcribed them into a proactive book, 'SELFLESS SELF' IN 2015 which is a worthy successor to the much celebrated 'I AM THAT', Talks given by his Master.

It has been applauded and accepted from all over and now has been translated into languages like French, Russian, German, Japanese, Chinese, Greek, Korean, Dutch, Spanish, etc.

Just before he took Mahasamadhi 'Ultimate Truth' a collection of Talks of Shri Maharaj from Ranjit ashram between March and November 2017 and Talks from the Master's USA visit has been published. It has the answer to every question in the mind of the seeker revealing the true identity of the selfless self by this Ultimate Truth.

Qualities

Maharaj had lived an exemplary honest and impeccable life. He disliked the spiritual marketing and hypocrisy that he witnessed in early childhood. After meeting Sadguru Nisargadatta Maharaj, he dedicated his worldly life along with self to the lotus feet of the Sadguru. His spiritual life was blooming fast. He became an accomplished Yogi. He turned from a seeker (Sadhak) to a Sadguru just as he pointed out, 'My Master used to say, I don't make disciple, I make Gurus'.

He was a good talented personality filled with good virtues. His blissful, ever smiling face, radiated positivity which attracted seekers like a magnet. No seeker would go unattended from his door. He respected every saint, even from other lineages, rather every individual. He led a balanced life. His sublime and saintly looks pour peace and love equally. He was compassionate, patient and humble.

His seekers include people from all walks of life. Teachers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, executives, professionals, etc. He rendered highest respect to his senior Gurubandhus, Shri Ramchandra Baba Chavan, Shri Joshi Kaka, Shri Pandit Kaka, Shri Satish Avhad.

He took utmost care of his father-in-law, more than that of a son. In spite of ill health, he continued to impart spiritual knowledge and guided his followers. He attended daily bhajans in the ashram, had talks and discussions on various issues in the afternoon and also clarified the doubts of the seekers over skype at night.

He never expected anything in return. When asked about Gurudakshina he would say, “Just do simple selfless Bhakti. Deposit your mind, ego and intellect here.” he would explain, “When a disciple meets the Master, he meets himself. Presence of a guru is like a catalyst. He helps to remove the illusion. Obstacles, just like in an onion, after removing the layers one by one, nothing remains.” What a simple example to explain such deep philosophy!

He would explain Non-duality giving different examples, sometimes in the language of a teacher, at times in that of a doctor or a lawyer. Once while having discussion with an executive he explained. “Different companies have different trade marks before merger. But after amalgamation, all trademarks dissolve and one final remains. Just like that after amalgamation with Sadgurvachan everything dissolves and one trademark remains i.e. ‘I am that’.

During Saptah celebrations he would open his house for his devotees who would stay there unhesitatingly. He would personally look into the arrangements to make them comfortable.

He never complained about any of his bodily pains. At the same time he didn't ignore them either. Seekers continuously lined up at his door from morning till night.

At times, he would forgo his lunch or postpone his dinner. Even during his terminal illness, in spite of being necessary to regulate meal timings, medicines and sleep he prioritised his devotees and experienced his sufferings all without any complaint.

Till his last day at Nashik, he did all his chores himself. He was never dependant on anyone for his work. He would enquire with every devotee and was never partial with anyone.

He personally looked over the facilities in the Ashrama be it making of floral garlands or buying things from the market, making arrangement for the devotees who would reside at the ashram etc.

He was instrumental in arranging MathYatra (a trip to various places of Samadhis of Masters of the lineage). He also started the 2-day Saptah at Phondaghat during Kojagiri Poornima celebrated on full moon day of Hindu lunar month of Ashwin (September – October).

The Tula

Shri Maharaj was gaining spiritual heights with followers clustering around him like bees around the sweet flowers. His followers decided to perform his Shreefal Tula and the auspicious day dawned on his birthday on 8th July 2018.

Shri Maharaj was physically weighed in a balance containing coconuts on one side. The significance of this function is that disciples surrender their ego in form of the coconut at the feet of the sadguru and the sadguru blesses them with the experience of the ultimate Selfless Reality just like the Sweet water inside the coconut.

The final Journey

But after this function his health started deteriorating fast. In this last days he suffered unbearable body pain. He had continuous cough due to which he was not able to sleep for nights. He was unable to lie down and had to continuously sit on the chair.

As the pain severed, he was shifted to breach Candy hospital in Mumbai. Both his sons arrived from U.S.A. Devotees started pouring in for the last visit of the Sadguru. Finally, on 31st August 2018 at 11:36 a.m. Shri Maharaj entered Mahasamadhi.

A small stream that had transformed into a huge river was awaiting to blend into the ocean. The individual bubble of existence ended and he got dissolved and liberated into the unity of everything, ultimate transcendence.

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