

01. Arch-donor Jain KulBhushan Sheth Shri Manikchand (J.P.)

A pre-dot: The people, who keep busy in doing good to others and use all their might in doing good earn respect and they are really great.

There have been many Jain millionaires in our days that have used their money for the uplift of society and lived a life, which became an ideal for others. Shri Manikchand Hirachand Zaveri of Bombay is one of such personalities. He did great things to the Jain society by his truthfully earned wealth. Ordinarily, millionaires are proud of their wealth and remain attached with the enjoyment of worldly pleasures, but Sheth Manikchand was an ardent exception. He has humble virtuous benevolent, always active to work and deeply religious.

Family Birth and Childhood:

Shri Gumanji, the grandfather of Sheth Manikchand was resident of Bhinder in District Udaipur of Rajasthan. He was trading in opium and shifted to Surat, in Gujarat in 1783 AD for the development of his business. Here he made a good progress and earned good wealth. He belonged to Visa Humad Caste and borne in the Gotra of Mantreshvar. Shri Hirachand, the father of Manikchand was born and brought up in Surat. He joined the business with his father. He married at the age of 20 with a Surat-based girl, Vijalibai, of his own caste. The couple was pious.

Vijaliben gave birth to Manikchand in 1852 A.D. and it was seen from the horoscope of the child that he will not only be very famous but also a great millionaire. The child was bright and charming. Hirachand always used to take the child with him to temple and brought him up with the knowledge of god and religion. The child was thoughtful and peace loving from the beginning. He had two elder brothers, Motichand and Panachand and one younger brother Navalchand in addition to two sister's Hemkumari and Manchhakumari. Manikchand lost his mother when he was only eight years of age and with her death, Sheth Hirachand had to look after homely work in addition to his working for trade. This did affect his business and he had to send his sons Motichand and Panachand with his daughter Hemkumari to a jewellery merchant of Bombay to learn the business.

Arrival at Bombay: in the Business of Jewellery:

Manikchand studied upto standard five in Surat and at the age of twelve, he came to Bombay with his father in 1864 A.D., leaving. Hirachand himself cooked food for the four brothers: Manikchand learnt accounts for one year with a shroff of Bombay. He was very hard working and had keen desire to learn. He took up the work of testing pearls and diamonds. His sister Hemkumari helped him very much in this task. He turned out to be a good expert in testing of diamonds and pearls very shortly. He earned a name in diamond market. By the time, all the four brothers were exceptionally good in this work. They got very good business from all sides. The people knew these four brothers by the loving name of RAMA. Among the four brothers, Panachand and Manikchand were more industrious, skillful and with deep understanding. They

earned good wealth within only four to five years. This was, evidently, the reward of their hard work and dedication.

Manikchand was more religious-minded among all the four brothers. He was habituated to go to temple. In Bombay he was always going to Jain temple of Gujaratis and worshipped with dedication. He used to sit for meditation and recite the holy name.

Manikchand earned a lot of wealth by 1864 A.D. in work of examining jewels and diamonds and now, he started his own business in 1869 A.D. He took the credit to be the first great in jewelry merchant in Visa Humad Digambar (i.e. without clothes) Jains. All the four brothers gave certain percentage of their income in charity and the rest to their father. Manikchand too was attached to do charitable activities.

These brothers started their own business-house under the name Manikchand Panachand Zaveri in 1871 A.D. This firm became famous and prestigious in no time.

Internal and External Property of the Zaveri Family:

The firm became very famous in Bombay and soon in India and abroad. Sheth Panachand was specialized in purchasing and Sheth Manikchand in selling pearls and diamonds. They always used to say, "Speak truth, act truthfully, We earn only by the force of truth". At the time of opening of this firm, Panachand was 22, Manikchand was 19, Motichand was 24 and Navalchand was 16. The four brothers worked with dedication. The firm made good profits. In 1876 A.D. some branches were opened in foreign countries also. They used to sell their goods to England and European countries. They sent one or two parcels of rupees fifty thousand each every week to foreign countries and this yielded twice as much profit. In foreign countries, people were beginning to wear jewellery-ornaments. They were very fond of diamonds and pearls. There was, therefore, very good trading continuously for two to three years with several foreign countries. The firm became popular and its ornaments and goods were considered to be second to none every where.

With the increase of wealth the brothers became more charitable and had more simplicity, sympathy. Manikchand freely mixed with others. He used to help Jains who came to Bombay to earn their livelihood. The brothers co-operated with open heart for the uplift of Jain community in North and South India. They, therefore, became famous as great donors in a few years.

In 1879 A.D., the father Hirachand was paralyzed and he died in 1881. Manikchand was extremely pained and he further became more charitable and religious minded.

Flow of Charity:

Charity is the basis of family life. A donor is always considered next to a saint and a brave person. Sheth Manikchand was kind since his childhood: he made following major donations.

- He donated a big building named Jubilee Baugh, priced at two and half lacs of rupees in those days to the Jain community. The monthly income of rent of this building was rupees eleven hundred.

- He donated rupees one Lac and twenty-five thousand for construction of a big inn Sheth Hirachand Gumanchand Dharmashala- (Hirabaug) in the memory of his father and this inn was inaugurated on December, 9th, 1905 in the presence of top Government officials and a very large number of Jains and Jains-loving people.
- He donated Rs. 20,000/- for Chandawadi inn in Surat.
- He donated Rs. 19,000/- for the temple and inn at Palitana.
- He donated Rs. 1,500/- for the Directory and Digambar Jains.
- He donated Rs. 25,000/- for Boarding at Allahabad.
- He donated Rs. 15,000/- for Boarding and Dispensary of Ahmedabad.
- He donated Rs. 10,000/- for renovation of Palitana temples.
- He donated Rs. 5,000/- for draught victims 1900 A.D.
- He donated Rs. 22,000/- for Hirachand Gumanji VidyaMandir at Kolhapur and this study-place was inaugurated by the king of Kolhapur in 1905 AD
- He donated Rs. 24,000/- for Boarding at Jabalpur.
- He donated Rs. 5,000/- for Girls' school at Surat.
- He donated Rs. 4,000/- for Boarding at Agra.
- He donated Rs. 4,000/- for Chaturbhai Auditorium at Kolhapur.
- He donated Rs. 1,000/- for Boarding at Hubli.
- He donated Rs. 25,000/- for Boarding at Ratlam.
- He donated Rs. 1,000/- for the temple of MoodBadri and so on.

Family Life:

He married to Chaturmati at the age of twenty-two. He could not stay much with his family because he kept himself busy in social affairs and business. He had two daughters named Maganbai and Foolkumari, but had one son by another marriage. His father had died in 1881 A.D. and after a few years his daughter was widowed. His first wife also died shortly. Since he had no son by the first wife, he had married for the second time because of the family pressure.

Sheth Manikchand built a large palace named "Ratnakar Palace" for his residence on Chaupatti at Bombay when he was only forty. He had a chapel also in this large building. The British Government was also attracted to him when he had donated Rs. 1,25,000/-. He was, therefore, honored with a title of "J.P." on March 14, 1906 AD in a special function. The Jain community also awarded him by a title of "Jain KulBhushan" on February 10th, 1910. He turned Myanmar (then Brahmadesh) for about two months from December 1911 AD.

Last Two Years:

Sheth Manikchand had to face a painful shock in last years of his life. The famous Speshi Bank of Bombay went bankrupt and he had to suffer a big loss thereby. He could not bear this strain and died shortly.

On July 16th, 1914, he did his daily work and worship in the morning. In the evening he worked in his office of the Committee of Hirabaug Tirthkshetra. He had been for a walk after meals at the seashore and had talks about religious teachings with numbers of his family till late at night. But soon he was sick. He had unbearable pain in his stomach. A doctor was called immediately. He went on repeating the name of Lord Arihant-Siddha and died after midnight. Countless people, especially from Jain community attended his funeral and condolence meetings were held at many cities all over India.

His Works for Social Up-Lift:

Establishment of Mumbai Digambar Jain Sabha: He happened to meet the great teacher Pandit Varya Gopaldasji Baraiya in 1893 A.D. at Bombay. Sheth Manikchand was deeply impressed with his lectures and his knowledge of religious books. They met together, obtained the co-operation of Jain community and established Mumbai Jain Sabha in 1893. This Sabha undertook several religious and social works. The Sabha set up Jain Pathshala (school for teaching Jainism), held examinations in religious knowledge, prepared preachers and spread Jainism, collected books for reading in temples, gave scholarships to outstanding students, started Ayurvedic dispensaries, took up proceedings for renovation of Jain-places of pilgrimage. It was decided to open branches of this Sabha in various regions of the country in the annual session of the Sabha held in 1900 A.D. Shri Premchand Motichand Zaveri, the cousin of Shri Manikchand was very much helpful in this task.

Beginning of Jain Mitra Periodical:

Sheth Shri Manikchand began this periodical as the main paper of Mumbai Jain Sabha in 1900 A.D. and the first editor of the periodical was Pandit Varya, the great learned Shri Gopaldasji Baraiya. Sheth Shri Manikchand was appointed as the proprietor of this periodical.

Establishment of Bharat-Varshiya Digambar Jain Tirthkshetra Committee:

On October 22nd, 1902, Pandit Gopaldasji Baraiya, Babu Devkumarji, Munshi Champatrayji and others co-operated and with their inspiration, a Tirthkshetra Committee was established in the grand session of Bharatiya Digambar Jain Mahasabha held at Chorashi Mathura. Sheth Shri Manikchand was elected as the General Secretary of this Committee.

Syadvad Vidyalaya, Benaras:

This Vidyalaya (i.e. the School) was established in 1906 A.D.

Sheth Shri Manikchand retired from his business in 1901 A.D. He happened to meet the celibate Sheetal Prasadji in the year 1905 A.D. at the time of Ujjain Pratishtha (Religious rite at Ujjain). He inspired Sheth Manikchand to encourage the study of Sanskrit and the prominent persons of all-India level in Jainism, like, Baba Bhagirathji, Ganesh Prasadji Varni, Pannalalji Bakliwal and Celibate Sheetal Prasadji established Syadvad Vidyalaya at the hands of Sheth Shri Manikchand in Benaras City which is considered to be the highest study-center of India. This Vidyalaya gave thousands of scholars and learned persons of high standard to the world of Jainism.

All-Round Expansion of Religious Studies:

For this purpose, Sheth Shri Manikchandji established schools in Benaras and Mumbai and the top scholars of Jainism like Pandit Nathuramji Premi, Pandit Pannalalji Bakliwal and others prepared high-level books for the study of Jainism. Sheth Manikchand helped them in all respect to prepare these books. Many of these books were gifted to great temples of India. He prepared a good library on Jainism in the chapel of own bungalow-Ratnakar palace. Sheth Manikchand honored and encouraged the prominent learned persons of his time. He had engaged Pandit Lalan and Pandit Madhvji to teach Jainism to his widowed daughter Maganbai.

General Education:

General education is invariably necessary along with religious education; otherwise it would be difficult to earn livelihood. Keeping this point of view in mind, Sheth Shri Manikchand established schools and boardings at Bombay, Ahmedabad, Ratlam, Jabalpur, Lalitpur, Akola, Nagpur, Meerut, Agra, Lahore, Kolhapur, Hubli, Sangli, Belgaum, Bangalore etc. Many Jain students stayed and studied in these boardings and schools upto graduation and even post graduation degrees.

Towards Social Reforms:

In those days many social evils like child-marriage, dowry, caste-circles and so on had strong hold over the society. To eradicate these evils, Sheth Shri Manikchand worked hard for female-education, Kindness to animals and birds and keeping away from eating meat. In all these tasks, he had the great help from Celibate Sheetal Prasadji; his own daughter and female-jewel Maganbai, contemporary learned person's scholars and several social institutions. Sheth Manikchand, thus, proved himself to be a social reformer. He was an able administrator and a sympathetic friend of the downtrodden.

Individual Behavior and Attachment for Learning:

He was very simple, honest, kind and reserve in behavior. He could know the man very well. He was insistent for just wages, truth, good dealings and reasonable charity. He always pressed to follow the norms of Jainism. He was not hardbound by religious ropes. Any Jain student could easily get admission to the boardings established by him. He was elected president of the meeting of Shwetambar Jain Visa Shrimali brothers held at Madhavbaugh, Bombay in 1908 AD. He granted financial assistance to one outstanding Sthanakvasi Jain student for going abroad. After 1901 A.D. he adopted limitations on his activities. He distributed all his property keeping certain portion for the society. He took the vow to be in the service of the society. He gave money very freely in calamities like earthquake, draught without discriminating between caste, creed or religion. He was very much interested in advancement of learning. He has a well-read person and learnt much from the scholar. He arranged further studies for his widowed daughter, Maganbai. He gave religions sermons when called for. In 1899, there was a serious outbreak of plague in Bombay. He stayed at Surat for about two months and taught religion to the borders.

Conclusion:

Thus, the life and deeds of Sheth Shri Manikchand are a source of inspiration for we all. He worked hard, he could know men at heart, his desire to up-lift the society, his unending deep love for learning, his large heartedness, sympathetic nature, his charitable nature, his desire to do something for others, his simplicity, his kindness and truthfulness and integrity even in the business of jewellery, his insistence to maintain highest levels of honesty in dealing with others, his tendency to make charity without discriminating between caste, creed religion and region show his brilliant individuality. Let of us follow his ideals!