

A Brief Life Of Atma Ramji Maharaj

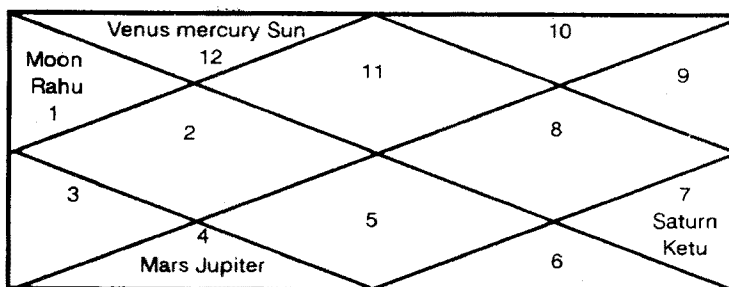
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Nineteenth century witnessed the complete stranglehold of British rule over India. The first attempt at independence in 1857 described by the rulers as mutiny, had flopped miserably. The company rule was over and now India had become a part of the mighty British empire under Queen Victoria. Having thus failed in the political field, a period of introspection followed and attention was naturally focussed on matters in the socio-religious sphere. Bengal spear-headed the process of intellectual fermentation and social reforms. Raja Ram Mohan Roy raised his voice against the evil of 'sati' system and child marriage. Ishwara Chandra Vidyasagar pleaded for widow re-marriage and spread of education among the Indians. Swami Dayanand Saraswati sought to interpret the Vedas and give a new meaning to Hindu religion, which he thought was ridden with superstition and muddled thinking. He inspired people to have faith in the ancient Hindu religion and tried to restore it to its pristine glory. Bhartendu Harish Chandra, in the literary field, was lamenting the evil days and evil tongues on which India had fallen. Under the blessings of Swami Ram Krishan Paramhans, Swami Vivekanand was to disseminate the message of Hinduism in the foreign lands as well as in India. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, at the same time, was trying to raise the Muslim community into a new awakening and strike a compromise with the present circumstances. No wonder that in these circumstances, in the renaissance of India, Jainism too did not lag behind. Shri Atmaramji maharaj appeared

on the scene and worked for the uplift of Jain religion. In fact he was to Jainism what Swami Dayanand Saraswati was to Hinduism. He perceived the deterioration and degeneration which had set in amongst the Jains, who were looked down upon as dirty atheist. They had forgotten their rich heritage and their deserted shrines stood a mute testimony to the heights which Jainism had attained in the past. The 'Yatis' and the 'Poojs', the spiritual leaders of Jains, had fallen from their high pedestal and taken to worldly pleasures and yet tried to force their supremacy in matters social and religious, on the laity. Shri Atmaramji Maharaj could not compromise with the prevailing set-up, which was not based upon the 'Aagams', or the authoritative Jain scriptures. The worshipper of the truth as he was, he tried to set things right, and raised a banner of revolt against darkness of ignorance. Naturally, he had to face stiff opposition from the superstitious and the die-hard conservatives. But he braved the storm cheerfully, and starting single handedly, slowly and gradually, brought the ship of Jainism on an even keel. It was indeed a misfortune that he did not live long enough to fully complete the mission that he had undertaken, and his dream remained unrealised. His passing away centenary is being celebrated in the year 1996, and this occasion should inspire his followers to finish the work which he left un-finished. That would be the best and constructive homage to the memory of a great and noble saint.

BIRTH & PARENTAGE

Shri Atmaramji Maharaj was born at a small village named Lehra which is situated at a distance of about 2 miles from Zira in Ferozepur District of Punjab on first bright half of the month Chaitra in Vikram Samvat 1894. His horoscope is given below :



The name of his mother was Rupa Devi and his father's name was

Ganesh Chand. It is known that the ancestral village of Shri Ganesh Chand was Kalash near Pind Dadan Khan (now in Pakistan). Shri Ganesh Chand held a respectable post in the army of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh and is said to have been posted at Hari-ke-pattan, the confluence of the two rivers Sutlej and Bias, with one thousand men under his command. Later on, it appears, he gave up his job and we find him in indigent circumstances. The cause of this change is not fully known, but the general belief held is that this change was brought about by one Shri Attar Singh Sodhi. It happened like this. Shri Ganesh Chand and Shri Attar Singh Sodhi were friends and the latter used to frequent the house of Shri Ganesh Chand. When Shri Atmaramji was still a child, Shri Attar Singh studied his body features and had a prognostication that this child would become a great man in future. As Shri Sodhi was without an issue, he requested Shri Ganesh Chand to give Atmaramji to him for adoption. This request was turned down by Shri Ganesh Chand and so the two fell out. As Shri Attar Singh Sodhi was a powerful man having an access to the powers that be, he managed to implicate Shri Ganesh Chand in dacoity cases, got him declared an out-law, and had him imprisoned. But he did not succeed in getting Shri Atmaram. Shri Ganesh Chand could well foresee the bitter consequences, which the enmity of Shri Sodhi would entail, and so he entrusted Shri Atmaram to Shri Jodhamal an Oswal of Zira, who was well known to him. Shri Jodhamal proved a friend indeed and undertook to bring up Shri Atmaramji as one of his own sons and so at the young age of 12, Shri Atmaramji came to Zira, under the loving care of Shri Jodhamal. It remains to be added that Shri Ganesh Chand was not Jain. He was Khatri of Kapur clan. But as Shri Jodhamal was a Jain, Shri Atmaramji was naturally influenced by Jainism and so when the time came, he took up Jain Diksha i.e. renunciation of the world as is done by Jain monks.

BOYHOOD

It appears that Shri Atmaramji did not get regular schooling in the sense it is understood now-a-days. But he was a precocious boy with good health. He could easily draw pictures and maps on the ground as is borne out by the following incidents. Playing cards were new in those days at Zira and Shri Atmaramji prepared a pack of cards himself and used to play with his friends. Once when they were doing so, an English soldier

happened to pass by the way and on seeing the playing cards, he asked for the pack. Shri Atmaramji willingly gave it away to the soldier. When the friends remonstrated, he said that he would easily prepare another one and he kept his promise. Similarly, one day he drew the map of his house with Shri Jodhamal and other members of the family having been shown into Shri Jodhamal saw this and was glad and commended Shri Atmaramji. Another incident worth relating is that once he saw a Muslim woman drowning with her babe in a water stream. Shri Atmaramji immediately jumped into the water and saved the lives of both of them. But for these stray incidents, not much is known about his boyhood, but naturally it cannot be anymore eventful when we remember that he renounced the world at the young age of 16 only. It can therefore well be inferred that he must have had a religious bent of mind and must have frequented the Jain monks alongwith his benefactor Shri Jodhamalji. These Jain monks belonged to 'dhundia' sect, which is now-a-days known as 'sthankakvasi' sect. There are two opinions about the name 'dhundia' : one is that the founder of this sect Shri Loveji Maharaj was ousted by the Jain community for his heretic views and was denied shelter. Accordingly, Loveji started dwelling in a dilapidated house which in the local dialect of Kathiawar is known as 'dhund' and hence the sect itself came to be known as 'dhundia'. The other is that this sect is engaged in the search of truth from different sources, and searching in popular language is connoted by the verb 'dhundna' and hence the name of the sect. However, the teachings of the Jain monks of the 'dhundia' sect did have a deep influence on the mind of Shri Atmaramji Maharaj and he showed his desire to be initiated into the order of the Jain monks. Shri Jodhamal naturally tried to dissuade him from doing so and also sought the help of his mother Rupa Devi, but Shri Atmaramji was firm in his determination. As such the permission had to be given. It may be mentioned here that Jainism allows a child or boy or girl to be initiated into the monkhood, but the willing permission of the concerned relatives is essential. And so Shri Atmaramji Maharaj was duly initiated as a disciple of Shri Jeewan Ramji Maharaj at Malerkotla in Vikram Samvat 1910 at the young age of sixteen.

LIFE OF JAIN MONK

Life of a Jain monk is not a bed of roses. It is a rigorously disciplined life with no room for comfort at all. A Jain monk is strictly

prohibited from owning any wealth or property. In fact he is not allowed to even touch money. He has to beg alms-only food and meagre clothing. For his daily food, he has to visit more than one house so that he takes only a very small quantity of food from an individual house. This is known as 'Gochri' which means that just as a cow takes a mouthful of grass here and a mouthful there so that no one single spot is grazed out, similarly a monk has to take a mouthful of food from different houses. A monk cannot keep food for the morrow and so he begs only for the requirement of a day. A Jain monk cannot indulge in the luxury of shaving and bathing etc. He has to pluck out the hair all by himself. He has to observe 'pratikraman' in the morning as well as in The Evening A 'Pratikraman' means that he obstructs the entry of sinful deeds into himself and throws out whatever sins he may have committed knowingly or unknowingly during the day and night. Besides this he has to undergo penance frequently i.e. keep fast because fasting curbs desire and keeps the body and mind in strict discipline. Jain monks can go without food for days together. A Jain monk has also to study scriptures as well as teach them to younger monks and preach the tenets of Jainism to laymen. They cannot pass their time in gossiping. All the time they observe 'samayak' i.e. inculcating a sense of equality of all living beings and respect for them and their rights. They cannot stay at one place for a long time. They have to be on the move regularly to spread the gospel of Jainism except during the four months of rainy season. This long stay of 4 months is known as 'chaturmas' and is utilised for intensive studies, hard penance, and inspiring the lay men into leading a religious life. As soon as the period of 'chaturmas' is over, the monks have to leave the place for another one. Of course, they have to travel on foot and are not allowed to ride a carriage or bus or train, as they have no money. They have to remain celibate and keep no possessions except for a few wooden utensils which they have to carry themselves. Shri Atmaramji must have known all this and hence willingly observed the rules of monkhood. But he was far ahead of others in the matter of study of Jain scriptures. He had a sharp intellect and is said to commit to memory even one hundred 'slokas' (sanskrit/prakrit, couplets) a day. In fact, we find him thirsty for knowledge and trying to obtain it from whatever sources he could. Only profound knowledge can show one the path of truth and Shri Atmaramji Maharaj was a devotee of truth.

THE DECISIVE DECADE

Jain philosophy gives the highest importance to knowledge. The attribute of the pure soul is knowledge. When a man after shedding his 'karma' attains the highest degree of emancipation, he acquires what in Jain terminology is known as 'Kewal Gnan'. The daily prayer of all Jains is known as 'Navkar Mantra' and in this prayer obeisance is paid to Arihant & Siddha who have attained Kewal Gnan, to Acharya who is the repository of knowledge, to Upadhyaya who disseminates knowledge and to the Sadhu who constantly endeavours to acquire knowledge. It will be clear from this that according to Jain philosophy, homage is paid to who so ever possesses highest knowledge irrespective of the fact whether he is a Jain or not. That is why, this prayer does not contain the name of any Tirthanker individually, although Jains believe in and worship 24 Tirthankers who attained the highest degree of knowledge. Shri Atmaramji Maharaj very well knew this and therefore the first task he set before himself, after renouncing the world, was to acquire knowledge. He tapped all the sources from where he could get knowledge, irrespective of the fact whether the teacher was a Jain monk or Jain layman. He was swayed by a burning desire to know things so that his mind opens up and he no longer remains the proverbial frog of the well. For ten long years, we find him immersed in studies, learning from great masters as well as teaching to younger ones. In fact a glimpse on his life during the first ten years of his taking the orders is an open castigation on those Jain monks who, after studying a couple of Jain scriptures, stop studying further on the pretext that they remain busy in the observance of rituals prescribed for Jain monks. Such monks not only delude themselves but they also delude the society because the Jain philosophy lays stress on the purification of the soul which is something inner and not outer. Having no bondage of the family and the worldly possessions and not burdened by the care of the daily creature requirements, Jain monks are in the ideal situation for the pursuit of knowledge. From this angle, Upashryas (shlter for the Jain monks) should become the centres of research and seats of highest learning, each monk specialising in one or the other branch of knowledge. Then and then only will they justify their existence and earn the respect of one and all. When we look at the yearning of knowledge of Shri Atmaramji Maharaj, our heart is filled with admiration for him and we begin to feel that

had he lived a bit longer, he would have formulated a strict code of learning for every one and he himself becoming a living example. But that was not to be. One can only wish at this juncture that Jain community will make a serious attempt to fulfil the dream he saw.

So the decade, starting from Vikram Samvat 1910 when Shri Atmaramji renounced the world to Vikram Samvat 1920, had a profound influence on his life. It was during this period that he studied the Jain scriptures and went from place to place to learn from scholars, whether monks or otherwise. The four month rainy period was especially made use of by him for study of a particular book. As his initiator Shri Jeewan Ramji was not a scholar, he took lessons from others. He studied 'Uttra dhyān sutra' from one Shri Kashi Ram, who was not a monk and in his first 'chaturmas' at Ranian-Sirsa, he completed its study with the help of Rup Rishiji. For studying 'Uvvai Oppatik sutra', he went to Shri Rud Mal, a Jain monk. After this, he went to Jaipur to study 'Acharanga Sutra' from a famous Jain monk Ami Chandji, who was well known for his scholarship. From Jaipur, he went to Ajmer and there also studied many Jain scriptures. To study 'Anuyogdwar sutra', he went to Nagaur to meet Shri Hans Raj, who was a Jain shravak. Again he made for Jaipur to meet Patwa Vaidya Nath, who was a Jain scholar, and learnt many books from him. Once again he went to Nagaur to study 'Suyadang', 'Prashana Vyakaran', 'Pannavna' 'Jeevabhigam' etc. By this time, he had mastered 'Dashvai Kalak', 'Utttradhyān', 'Sutra Kritang' 'Sthanang', 'Anuyogdwar', 'Nandi', 'Aavashyak' & 'Brihat Kalp', and committed to memory ten thousand 'slokas' or couplets. Having met different scholars and mastering all the important scriptures, Shri Atmaramji made a niche for himself. But he was not a person to rest on oars. Study of these scriptures had whetted his appetite for more knowledge. By this time, he realised that he had omitted one very important study i.e. grammar, without which it is difficult to make out the correct meaning for oneself, and has to depend upon others' interpretation. Different interpretations by different scholars give rise to confusion and one becomes doubt-ridden which meaning to accept and which to reject. Now Shri Atmaramji got interested in knowing the true meaning and finally accepting it. Blind faith was giving room to enlightened faith. He had also looked at the temples and Jains worshipping there and this had naturally raised a question in his mind whether that path represents the ancient Jain religion or the sect in

which he was initiated where going to temple is a taboo. Truth must be known but how? Study of grammar was a help and so he remained on the look out for the study of grammar. An opporounity presented itself at Ropar, where he went to learn from a scholar named Shri Sadanand. This study opened the flood gates of critical evaluation of any book. Now he could study not only Jain scriptures, but non-Jain holy books too and thus a compartive study of different philosophies could help him arrive at the truth.

TURNING POINT

In his quest for truth, Shri Atmaramji Maharaj made for Agra where he wanted to meet a very scholarly Jain monk named Shri Ratan Chhandji and discuss with him a number of points which had sown the seeds of doubt in his mind. He sought him out particularly because Shri Ratan Chandji was also known for his liberal views and unprejudiced thinking. In order to have ample time for discussion and clarification, Shri Atmaramji Maharaj arranged to have his rainy season stay of four months at Agra in Vikram Samvat 1920. This Chaturmas proved a land-mark in his religious career. As already mentioned, Shri Atmaramji Maharaj was initiated in monkhood in the then prevalent Dhundia sect of Jainism. The founder of this sect was a layman by the name of Lonkaji, who, under the influence of then Muslim rulers, rejected the idea of idol worship in the 16th century. The argument advanced by him was that in the worship of idols, water and flowers are made use of which involve 'hinsa' and Jainism believes in Ahinsa. However, in order to prove that this sect had been in vogue from the very beginning, he refused to accept as genuine all those books which had any reference to idol worship. If anyhow it became necessary to accept a particular book, he interpreted the words bearing on temples, worship etc differently, and made his followers to accept the changed meanings. This changed interpretation was handed down from one generation of the monks to the other and it was enjoined upon every one to accept it without question. To avoid the discovery of truth, it was also counselled that no monk should study grammar because the study of grammar will lead to disbelief and breach of faith. That is why Shri Atmaramji Maharaj also did not study grammar in the early years of monkhood, although he studied other scriptures. But when he discovered for himself that without the study of grammar, he felt handicapped, he

learnt it. But then different interpretations of the same text boggled his mind. In order to have clarification, he met Shri Ratanchandji at Agra. In keeping with his reputation, Shri Ratan Chandji enlightened Shri Atmaramji Maharaj and then it became crystal clear to him that the sect which he had adopted was not the ancient Jain religion which advocated idol worship and magnificent temples and thousands of idols were a testimony to it. Shri Ratanchandji confirmed all this. Shri Atmaramji then put a question to him that if he believed in the true ancient Jain religion, why he stuck to the fake sect. Shri Ratanchandji then confessed that he was too old and felt too powerless to preach the true gospel and hoped that Shri Atmaramji would carry on the job which he did not dare. This made up the mind of Shri Atmaramji and he vowed to himself that he would preach truth and only truth, for which he had renounced the world.

STRUGGLE STARTS

Shri Atmaramji Maharaj was now 26 years of age and at the height of power physically and mentally. The slogan that he had coined for himself was 'Sacha so mera' i.e. whatever is true is mine and to this end he was determined to work without prejudice for which he had coined another slogan of not insisting on whatever I say. (Give up the prejudice 'Mera so sacha'). He not only gave these slogans but also lived according to them. As such he thought of preaching the truth that he had discovered. Luckily, he came across two disciples of Pooj Amar Singhji, who was the religious leader of the time in Punjab. Shri Atmaramji took these two disciples named Bishan Chand and Champa Lal into confidence and communicated to them whatever he had learnt at Agra from Shri Ratan Chandji. Shri Atmaramji told them that they should not accept whatever he said without critical evaluation and if they had any doubts or questions, they should place them before him unhesitatingly and discuss all matters freely and frankly. Sound knowledge imparts confidence and the two were convinced that whatever Atmaramji said had a true ring about it. Later on Hakim Roy and Nihal Chand were also converted to the views of Shri Atmaramji and then all the five started preaching the true tenets of ancient Jain religion. One must understand that this was not an easy task and preaching the genuine tenets of religion in Punjab was like swimming against the current, for which few have the courage and confidence. Shri Atmaramji was made of sterner stuff and he willingly took the risk for the sake of truth. He knew that he could be ostracised from the monkhood in

which case he would not be given shelter or food and he could be reduced to the position of a starving beggar. But for the sake of truth he did not mind whatever may befall him. It was at Malerkotla that he unfurled the flag of true tenets of Jainism and converted two persons named Kanwar Sain and Mangat Ram to his views. Shri Bishen Chand & Shri Champa Lal were doing the same at Jandiala Guru and converting Shri Mohar Singh and Bisakhi Mal and Lala Buta Rai of Amritsar. In this way, starting from a trickle, in a short time thousands were converted and initiated into the true ancient Jain religion. The traditions die hard and men are naturally conservative and find it easy to tread the familiar path. So when Atmaramji shed new light to dispel darkness of ignorance, Jain laymen did not automatically accept his views. They would ask for proof/and also invite Atmaramji to take part in 'shastrarth' i.e. wordy duel between the scholars. Shri Atmaramji did not shy away as he had mastered the scriptures along with their interpretations and explanations and annotation, he would quote them verse for verse to prove his point. While delivering a lecture, he would ask the audience to demand clarification from him on any point they felt doubt and that he would do his best to satisfy them. And if anybody wanted to discuss the matters in private, he would be glad to receive him at the place where he was staying. He would say that people buy earthen pots of meagre value after fully satisfying them that are not cracked; faith is of much higher value, so why not accept it only after sound knowledge. He would declare that after profound study and deep understanding, he had discovered a nugget of gold in the true teachings of the Perfect Soul. He believed that it was pure and not stolen : then why be afraid of having it tested on a touchstone in the open. He would pronounce that he would be glad if anyone could convince him of the wrong path and he would immediately give it up. But if others are convinced that what he said was the truth, then why hesitate in accepting it. In this way, he won over Jain laymen and monks on to his side, not by using a glib tongue but on the firm ground of sound knowledge and correct judgment.

IN OPEN CONFLICT

The views expressed by Shri Atmaramji naturally brought him in conflict with established authority. Pooj Shri Amar Singhji represented the establishment. By issuing an order, he exhorted his people that they should not make obeisance to Shri Atmaramji nor give him shelter, nor hear his lecture, nor give him food, because he has abjured the 'dhundak'

faith. It may be added here that 'dhundia' monks tie a piece of cloth to their mouth, while there is no such prescription in the ancient Jain religion. This piece of cloth called 'Mukh-patti' has become a mark of distinction of 'dhundia' monks and it was in the 18th century only that a monk by the name of Loveji started this fashion. Now that Atmaramji was declared as ostracised alongwith his followers and Jain believers, it was useless to stick to the dress prescribed by 'dhundia' faith. So in Vikram Samvat 1932, Shri Atmaramji and his followers pulled out the piece of string that had tied their mouths and souls so far. This marked the formal break with the 'dhundak' sect. Shri Atmaramji Maharaj & his fellow monks now felt liberated. They were 20 in number and had thousands of Jain laymen as their followers. The revolution ushered in by Shri Atmaramji in Punjab was now firmly entrenched. His name had become a household not only in Punjab but his fame spread in other parts of India too, although he had not visited them personally. In this way, starting from Vikram Samvat 1921 to Vikram Samvat 1932, for eleven long years, Shri Atmaramji had to pass through difficult years, advancing inch by inch, discussing, arguing, converting monks as well as the laymen. One false step and his name would never have been heard. But he was sure of what he had learnt and wanted to impart that knowledge to others, not for establishing his leadership, but with the sole purpose of disseminating the truth without prejudice. After all 'Satyamev Jayate' is rooted in the culture of India. Now that the break with 'dhundia' sect was final and irrevokable, Shri Atmaramji Maharaj made up his mind to visit Gujrat, the home of many famous Jain shrines. Jainism may be said to have originated in U.P. and Bihar in the sense that except for 22nd Trithanker Shri Nemi Nath, all the other tirthankers belonged to either of these two provinces and mostly preached there. It was King Samprati, the grand son of King Asoka, who preached the message of Jainism in western India, particularly Gujrat and Rajasthan. Many of the temples in these provinces are said to have been constructed at the orders of King Samprati who was to Jainism what Asoka was to Buddhism. But once Jainism appeared in these states, people took to it like fish to water and the result is that in modern times, temples in these states have become the object of religious pilgrimage. Shri Atmaramji wanted to visit Gujrat earlier, but he was not accorded permission for doing so and like a disciplined disciple, he carried out the orders of his Guru. Now, he received an invitation to visit Ahmedabad which has a vast Jain population. So he set out for Gujrat visiting many shrines on the way and

stayed at Ahmedabad for four months of the rainy season in Vikram Samvat 1932. There he met Maharaj Buddhi Vijayji, who too, like Atmaramji, was initiated into 'dhundia sect' under the name of Buta Royji and had renounced the sect on discovery of the truth. Shri Atmaramji formalised his entry into the ancient Jain religion by becoming disciple of Shri Buddhi Vijayji, alongwith 15 of his followers, and also put on the dress prescribed in the ancient books. As a distinguishing mark, from the 'dhundia' sect, he also took on a yellow mantle. After holding his Vikram Samvat 1933 'chaturmas' at Bhavnagar in Gujrat and 1934 'chaturmas' at Jodhpur (Rajasthan) he came back to Punjab to nurse the sapling he had planted into prosperous growth.

To signify the change, he was now given the name of Shri Anand Vijay, although his old name Shri Atmaramji still sticks in the memory of his followers and now-a-days he is known by both of his names. Later on, however, when he was conferred the honour of being an Acharya, his name again underwent a change as per Jain tradition and he came to be known as Vijayanand.

AMONG THE HIGH AND THE MIGHTY

Jains constitute a minority in India. That was the case in 19th century and is still so. Majority generally tends to dismiss the opinions and beliefs of the minority with contempt and remains ignorant about it. Jains too have suffered this fate, especially because Jains as a community are given to commerce and industry, and high education and scholarship has been their Achilles heel. Now that Shri Atmaramji or Anand Vijayji Maharaj had come to be regarded as the spokesman of the philosophy and religion of Jainism, it fell upon him to project the true image of Jainism. He, therefore, did not miss an opportunity of presenting Jainism in its true colours. In this connection, his meetings with the kings of Bhavnagar, Bikaner, Jodhpur and Limbri are memorable, during which he expounded the tenets of Jain philosophy or removed the misconceptions prevalent among the general public. The first of these meetings took place with the king of Bhavnagar state. The king asked for the views of Shri Anand Vijay on the well known dictum of Vedanta-Brahma Satyam Jagann Mithya i.e. Only the God is true, rest all false. Shri Anand Vijayji explained that Jainism accepts this from one angle and rejects it from another. According to Jain philosophy, truth is not absolute. A statement from one angle may be true while from another angle it may be wrong. For example 'A' is son from the angle of his father but if we say the same thing from the angle of his wife, it

will be wrong, because from the angle of the wife, he is a husband, as from the angle of his sister, he is a brother. To say absolutely that he is a son or brother or husband will be far away from the truth. So 'God is true and the universe is false': the statement has to be qualified. Jainism believes that the ultimate goal of living beings is to become Perfect (A perfect soul is the embodiment of Godhood) and therefore they strive or should strive to that end. From this angle perfection of the soul is the real important thing and hence it may be said that Brhma is Satyam. But at the same time, one cannot wish away the real concrete world in which we live and die, form relations, write books and preach, discover the principles of science and technology etc. From this angle, it cannot be said that the universe is untrue or false. In other words, if we say that the universe is false because things in it are liable to destruction and perish and that the soul is the only imperishable thing, then one might say that the universe is false. But if we imply that the universe has no existence at all, just as horns on the head of a donkey are non-existent, then Jainism cannot accept this statement as true. Now, you cannot say that speaking of the statement as true and false at the same time means that Jain philosophy is double dealer, it will be travesty of truth. In fact Jain philosophy is all embracing and tries to resolve the seemingly conflicting statements, whatever one might say. In his meeting with king of Bikaner, Shri Anand Vijayji said that the basic philosophy of Jainism is known as Syadvad. In this the word 'syad' does not mean perhaps: it means from a certain angle. Jainism believes that the things we see in the world have different aspects. If one insists on only one aspect, not mentioning the others, one will be wrong. Therefore, if a person is to make a statement, he must imply a certain aspect of the thing, otherwise he is liable to go wrong. Words are limited while the aspects are many. That is why this philosophy is also known as 'Anekantvad'. The universe comprises of many things, and if we deeply look at them, we will find that they have a beginning (birth), existence (life) and end (death). According to Vedic tradition, this is known as 'utpad dhrovyā and vya'. According to Jain terminology, this very thing is connoted by the name of 'Paryaya' and 'Dravya', the former word meaning creation and death and the latter word meaning the existence. For an example, take a golden bangle. It had a beginning and is existing. Now it is broken and converted into a ring. Now the ring has a beginning and it may also end one day but the gold contained either in the bangle or the ring is not perishable. Thus gold is 'dravya' while bangle or the ring are its

'paryaya'. Paryaya can be many while the 'dravya' is one. Both are however inseparable. At the same time they give rise to difference. Thus both these aspects of a thing have to be accepted and Jain philosophy considers it logical and justified. Applying it to living beings, soul may be called dravya, while living beings in different shapes like human beings, animals, birds, fishes etc may be called 'Paryaya'. The soul performs good deeds or the bad deeds. Accordingly, it is born as angels or human beings or animals. Jainism prescribes the shedding of all deeds (Karma) in order to become the perfect and pure soul which is called 'Parmatma'. Once one attains this perfection, one is not born in the world, just as a parched gram does not have the power to germinate : so a soul after penance attains the perfect state. This in short is the philosophy of Anekantvad on the basis of which Jainism advocates Ahimsa or non-violence. As basically all living beings are souls which in the world appear differently according to their deeds, so they all are equal, and it does not behove the equal souls to be violent against one another. Thus Ahimsa in conduct and Anekantvad in philosophy constitute the essentials of Jainism.

In his meeting with the brother of king of Jodhpur, Shri Anand Vijayji said that Jainism is often dubbed as anti-Vedas, and athiest which is without any justification. To start with, he said that there are nine philosophical systems in India viz. Nayaya, Vaisheshak, Sankhya, Yoga, Meemansa, Vedanta, Buddhism, Jainism and Charvak. Out of these, the first six are classified as theist and the later three said to be athiest (Nastik). Now the question is 'what is the definition of the word 'Nastik'. He clarified that Nastik is one who does not believe in the existence of the soul and the other world. From this point of view, Jainism cannot be called 'Na stik' because it believes in both of these things. As far the question of anti-Vedic is concerned, well Jainism certainly does not accept Vedas as an authority, especially the part which is against non-violence. Jainism believes in 'Ahimsa Parmo Dharma' i.e. non-violence is the best of religion and certainly does not contribute to the maxim 'Vediki himsa himsa na bhavti' i.e. killing as permitted by Vedas is not violence or killing. In any case non-belief in the Vedas does not authorise anyone to call that person as heretic just as a man who does not believe in say Quran of the Muslims becomes 'kafir' or an heretic. As far non-belief in God is concerned, well Jainism does believe in God in the sense of a Perfect Soul (Parmatma) and all Jains pay homage and make obeisance to such God. But Jainism does not believe in God as the Creator of the Universe because doing so

becomes illogical. Moreover, 'Sankhya' and 'Meemansa' philosophical systems also do not believe in God as the Creator of the Universe. For example, Kumaril Bhatt says 'No fool will indulge in any work without purpose; what is the purpose of God in creating the universe?' In the light of this, why does one not call these two philosophical systems as atheist, while Jainism is dubbed as athiest. This is entirely due to the fact of either ignorance of the correct position taken by Jainism or to prejudice. As per Jain philosophy a soul has to pass through different forms on account of the 'karma' deeds committed by him. As soon as he is free of this 'karmic' bondage, he attains 'moksha' i.e. emancipation. Once a soul has attained emancipation, he cannot be re-born in the world just as a parched gram does not germinate. This conception of 'moksha' of Jains is the same as advocated by Vedic philosophical systems which say that completely getting rid of 'Agnan' i.e. ignorance or grief and obtaining of peace of mind (parmanand) is emancipation. Then what is wrong with Jainism when ultimate object is similar?

In his meeting with the king of Limbri, Shri Anand Vijayji explained that Jains do not believe in the opinion that God is the creator of the universe. In doing so, many contradictions creep in. For example, all the things that we look in the world have body and they were created by one who has a body. A bodyless existence cannot create a body. The sky is bodyless and it cannot create a body. As it is understood that God is without a form or body, then how it can create the universe which has a body existence. And if we say that God has a body, then the question will crop up 'who created God'? This will have no end. Secondly, if a thing is created, the creator of the thing must have a desire and make an effort. If we consider God as the Creator of the universe, then it will have to be admitted that God has desire. This involves contradiction because God is considered above all desires and omni-present (sarva vyapak). Moreover, in creation of a thing, there is always some purpose. Now what possibly can be the purpose of God in creation of the world. If He is purposeless, then creation is not possible. And if he has purpose, then God is something less than Godhead. If for the sake of argument it is said that God created the world with the purpose of rewarding or punishing the good or bad deeds of the living beings, then also it is untenable. It implies that God was actuated by the deeds of living beings into creating the world. This statement does not leave God free and makes him out under the influence of some one but by very definition God is under no body.

Supposing he has created the world with this purpose, it implies that he actuates the living beings into doing the deeds, which robs the living beings of their freedom to act. So in considering God as the Creator of the Universe does not stand argument. Therefore, Jains believe that the creation is without a beginning and without an end because in such a belief, no contradiction is involved. However, majority of the people are ignorant of the grounds on which Jains do not consider God as the Creator of the Universe, so they simply dub Jains as atheist and heretic. But if one considers the stance taken by Jains sympathetically and without prejudice, they will find Jainism as an enlightened philosophical system. One thing which becomes transparently clear from his meetings with the great and learned personalities of the day is that he had a thorough knowledge not only of the Jain scriptures but also of the holy books of other religions and sects. He could and would quote extensively from all the sources, Jain or non-Jain, which shows that he had mastered the art of comparative study of different systems. In fact without historical and comparative study, it is difficult to evaluate any system critically. We know that he was not born in a Jain family but in 'khatri' family and so Jainism was a religion he had adopted of his own choice. Had he found it wanting in any way, he would not have hesitated to give up its profession just as he boldly gave up the 'dhundia' sect in which he was initiated. On account of the confidence born out of his erudite scholarship, he was never afraid of facing challenge from any quarter. The king of Jodhpur had in fact planned a meeting of Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Shri Vijay Anandji Maharaj, but unfortunately when Shri Vijay Anandji Maharaj came to Jodhpur where he was to meet Swami Dayanand, the latter had expired at Ajmer, and so the meeting of the two only remained a wishful thinking. Besides the meetings mentioned above, people from all walks of life would meet him and question him and he would satisfy them all at their own level. Western scholars too like A.F. Rudolf Hoernle approached him for any clarification on Jainism and were fully satisfied. It was out of a sense of obligation that Shri Hoernle dedicated his edition of Uvasaga Dasao, a Jain Agam, to Shri Atmaramji Maharaj. It was not for nothing that Shri Atmaramji Maharaj, who was then considered spokesman of Jainism, was extended invitation to the World Parliament of Religions held at Chicago, which he himself could not attend personally but sent his representative Shri Vir Chand R. Gandhi, although in those times, crossing the seven seas was considered a sin by the Jain community, as by all others. This shows his liberal mind

and far-sightedness. To those who opposed the foreign travelling of Shri Vir Chand R. Gandhi, Shri Atmaramji said that the time was not far when their sons and daughters would go to foreign countries simply for the sake of enjoyment, although today they were averse to sending their representative for the sake of preaching of religious gospel. How prophetic have been his words | In fact one cannot but agree with the comments in the report of World Conference of Religions "No man has so peculiarly identified himself with the interests of the Jain Community as Muni Atmaramji. He is one of the noble band who from the day of initiation to the end of life work day and night for the high mission they have under-taken. He is the high priest of the Jain community and is recognized as the highest living "Authority" on Jain religion and literature by oriental scholars".

A MULTI-COLOURED PERSONALITY

Shri Atmaramji Maharaj was not only a religious head who took his mission with zeal and enthusiasm. He was a persuasive speaker, an effective debator, a distinguished author, an appealing poet, an inspirer of the construction of the temples, interested in the proper up-keep of old libraries known as 'Gnan Bhandars', an educationist who dreamed of temples of learning 'Sarswati mandirs', a reformer and a revolutionary, besides interest in many other things. In fact, he kept up the tradition of Shri Heer Vijay Suri, who influenced the great Moghul, Akbar, of Shri Hem Chandra Suri, who was known as 'kalikal sarvagya' i.e. the walking encyclopaedia of the modern times. In view of this, he too was conferred with the honour of being an Acharya i.e. the highest religious authority, at Palitana, the famous pilgrimage Centre of Jains, in the year Vikram Samvat 1943 at the age of 49. He was the author of 'Jain Tattvadarsh' considered by some as his magnum opus, 'Tattva nirnay prasad', 'Agnan Timir Bhaskar', besides 'Nav Tattva', 'Samyaktva Shalyoddhar', Jain Mat Vriksha', 'Chaturth stuti Nirnay', 'Jain Prashnottar Ratnavali, and 'Chicago Prashnottar'. All these books have been written by him in Hindi although he was a scholar of Sanskrit, Prakrit, Upbharansha' (for the benefit of common man). The use of medium Hindi, the language of the common man, is in keeping with the traditions of Jainism which has identified itself, not with the elite, but with the man in the street, so that the message of Jainism reaches far and wide and filters down to the lowest level. As a devotional poet, he may well be placed in the category of Tulsidas, Surdas & Meera. His compositions can be said to be lyrics inasmuch as they can

be put to music, in fact all of them have been put to music and are still widely sung in the temples. Starting from 'Atam Bavni' which he composed in vikram Samvat 1927, he went on to 'Jin Chaubisi', 'Satrah Bhedi Puja', 'Bis Sthanak Puja', 'Asht prakari puja', 'Nav pad puja' and 'Sanatra puja'. The word 'puja' should not mislead anybody. It is not taken in the narrow connotation of a ritual ceremony. In all of them, the poet feels ecstatic at the highest bliss achieved by 'Vitrage' or 'Parmatma' and expresses a yearning for attainment of the same bliss. He feels sad that he is still in the bondage of 'karma' and has not attained liberation from the evil pain of birth and death. He places himself in the hands of 'Parmatma' as he is like an innocent child who needs be led, and helped. The songs of the poet have a quality of spontaneity, an effervescence of pure soul and leave the listener in to such an emotional state that he feels himself transported in some ethereal world. Singing these hymns is truly an experience.

As an archaeologist, he looked at the old libraries situated in places like Patan(Gujrat) and Khambhat, and inspired Jain laymen to keep their proper maintenance. He had some useful manuscripts copied and sent them to different places. He himself made use of them for reference purposes, as in Khambhat where he completed his book 'Agnan Timir Bhaskar'. It may be mentioned here that these Jain libraries, or 'Gnan Bhandars' as they are known, not only keep Jain literature but also house what may be called secular literature or literature belonging to other sects and religions. Indeed these libraries have shed valuable light in the construction of history of the by gone times.

As already mentioned, Punjab was in the grip of 'dhundia' sect of Jainism and so the few Jain temples wore a deserted look and had become the private property of Yatis or the Poojs. Shri Atmaramji Maharaj inspired Jain layment to have new temples built and nowadays, if we see this region dotted with the temples, it is all the work of Shri Atmaramji Maharaj. He got a link established between Gujrat and Punjab and quite a number of idols were sent from Gujrat to Punjab for worship. He himself presided over the establishment of a temple for worship, which in Jain terminology is called 'Pratishtha'. The last of such 'pratishtha' by him was in Vikram Samvat 1953 at Sankhatra (now in Pakistan) when he was 59. When it was pointed out to him that a number of temples have already been constructed for worship purposes, he said that from then on he proposed to set up 'sarswati mandirs', the temples of learning. For this

purpose he opined that Gujranwala would prove suitable to start with and so he set out for Gujranwala to hold the 'Chaturmas' there. But fate had willed otherwise. It was a hot summer. Shri Atmaramji Maharaj set out for Gujranwala from Sankhatra via Kila Sobha Singh & Pasrur. At Pasrur, food was not available and so he set out further at 4 P.M. and reached Barala village. There he had an attack of asthma and then with great difficulty, he could come to Gujranawala on foot. On the fateful 7th of the bright half of month Jyeshtha Vikram Samvat 1953, he breathed his last, when he was not even sixty years of age. An eventful career thus came to a sudden end, leaving the dream of establishment of 'sarswati mandir' unfulfilled. Had he lived longer, there is no doubt he would have realised his vision and made the educationally backward Jain community into an advanced one because he believed "Sub men gnanvant barbir" i.e. the one with deep knowledge is the bravest. The whole of his life is an epitome of this dictum and it remains for his followers to tread the path that he has shown.

APPENDIX

Birth	Samavt	A.D.
Lehra Village	1894	1837 1st of bright half of Chaitra
Diksha(dhundia)	1910	1853 5th of bright half of Margshirsh. (Maler Kotla)
Chaturmas(First)	1911	1854 Study of Uttradhyan Sutra. Sirsa-Ranian
Sargathla	1912	1855
Jaipur	1913	1856
Nagaur	1914	1857
Jaipur	1915	1858
Ratlam	1916	1859
Sargathla	1917	1860
Delhi	1918	1861
Zira	1919	1862
Agra	1920	1863
Malerkotla	1921	1864
Sirsa	1922	1865 Studied Astrology
Hoshiarpur	1923	1866
Binoli	1924	1867 Wrote 'Nav Tattva'
Baraut	1925	1868
Malerkotla	1926	1869

Binoli	1927	1870	Composed 'Atam Bavni'
Ludhiana	1928	1871	
Zira	1929	1972	
Ambala	1930	1973	Composed 'Jin Chaubisi'.
Hoshiarpur	1931	1974	
Ahmedabad	1932	1975	Second Diksha From Buddhi Vijay
Bhavnagar	1933	1876	
Jodhpur	1934	1877	
Ludhiana	1935	1878	
Jandiala Guru	1936	1879	
Gujranwala	1937	1880	Wrote 'Jain Tattvadarsh'.
Hoshiarpur	1938	1881	Composed 'Satrah Bhedi Puja'.
Ambala	1939	1882	Wrote 'Agnan Timir Bhaskar'.
Bikaner	1940	1883	Composed 'Bis Sthanak Puja'.
Ahmedabad	1941	1884	Wrote 'Samyaktva Shalyoddhar'.
Surat	1942	1885	Wrote 'Jain Mat Vriksha'.
Palitana	1943	1886	'Acharya pad' conferred. Composed 'Asht Prakari Puja'.
Radhanpur	1944	1887	Wrote 'Chaturth stuti Nirnay' (I)
Mehsana	1945	1888	
Jodhpur	1946	1889	Wrote 'Jain Prashnottar Ratanavli'
Malerkotle	1947	1890	
Patti	1948	1991	Wrote 'Chaturth stute Nirnay' (II) Composed Nav Pad Pooja.
Hoshiarpur	1949	1992	Wrote 'Chichago Prashnottar'.
Jandiala Guru	1950	1893	Composed 'Sanatra Puja'
Zira	1951	1894	Wrote 'Tattva Nirnay Prasad'.
Ambala	1952	1895	
Nirvan Pad	1953	1896	7th of bright half of Jyetha.

