

25. Celibate Pandit Chandabai

Introduction:

This is the story when Raja Ram Mohan Ray, Ishwarchandra VidyaSagar, Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati, Shrimad Rajchandra, Shri Ramkrishna Paramhans and other personalities were in efforts to wipe out the darkness prevailing on over country.

The female community was suffering very much because of ignorance, evil practices, blind faith and social excesses. Daughters were burden on their parents and the birth of a daughter in the family was considered to be a disgrace of God on the family. In these days, one great woman was born. She taught women to live with self-respect and self-efforts. She enlightened them, taught them to be free from fear. She presented her own life before them and led them to be brave and turn to true renunciation. She encouraged them to be courageous to fight against the prevailing social evils. She was a nun in self-penance, efficient and devoted to social services, and saw the whole world with love and sympathy. She was religious in her life and patriot in the service of the country. She saw possibilities in the presence, recognized the greatness of the past and assessed the circumstances in the future. This was highly learned mother Chandabai.

Birth and Childhood:

Pandita Chandabai was born at Vrindavan in 1890 in a rich Agrawal Vaishnav family. Shri Narayandasji and Shrimati Radhikadevi were her parents. Her childhood passed in the devotion of Shri RadhaKrishna -i.e. in prayers to Lord Krishna and his beloved Radhika. She earned faith from the childhood songs of her mother. She learnt to be dedicated to her work from her father. She was married to Shri Dharmkumarji, son of Chandrakumarji and grandson of Pandit Prabhudasji at the age of only 11. This was a famous family of Goyal family line and was devoted to Jainism. Her husband Shri Dharmkumarji died within a year of his marriage. Thus, Chandabai became widow at the age of 12 only.

Shri Devkumarji, who was a famous writer in Jain community, was the elder brother of Shri Dharmkumarji. He was also religious minded and always eager to do good of others. He was deeply unhappy with the untimely demise of his younger brother and consequent widowhood of demise of his younger brother and consequent widowhood of Chandabai. He however took immediate decision with wisdom, non-attachment and patience. There was no salvation for anyone without true knowledge and virtues with knowledge were indispensable for the up-lift of man. Chandabai began to learn again with the advice and inspiration of Shri Devkumarji. She faced many difficulties but she passed the examination of Pandita-a woman Pandit-a learned woman from Kashi-Benaras.

Her Works:

She always thought of women living as a subordinate or servant with covered face, ignorant and prays to evil practices of the society. She strongly believed that the only way to save the women is to impart her sufficient learning and invest her with good culture. If she is not illiterate she will certainly be healthy. She can be self-supporting if she was learned to some extent. She would earn prestige by spiritual practices. She kept all those things in view; she started a girl's school in 1907 at Agra City for expanding learning among girls. She obtained two rooms in the temple of Shantinath Bhagwan and appointed two lady teachers. This school went on advancing and it became known as Jain Balashram in 1921. Today it is an exceptional institution for the learning of girls. It is a symbol of Chandabai's service to women. Mahatma Gandhi saw the Vanita Vishram established by Chandabai and said, "I am very much pleased to see the Vanita Vishram started by Chandabai. I am happy to see its peaceful atmosphere". Thus, this a unique institution for the uplift of women of Jain

community. Students are taught upto the degree of Nyaya Tirth, Sahitya Ratna and Shastri in this school.

Mother Chandabai - An Idol of Pity:

Mother Chandabai was deeply religious and she had worked to symbolize her spiritual nature. There were five hills at Rajgruhi. Chandabai constructed a grand Jain temple on a hill known as Ratnagir by purchasing land on it. She constructed an attractive Man Stambh a big pillar-in the compound of Bala Vishram in 1939. She constructed an imitative idol of Shri Gommat Swami from the one established at Shravan Belgola in 1937 and created an artful mountain. She also got prepared an idol of Bahubali Swamy, which was 13 feet high, and both these holy idols were established under grand celebrations.

Pandita Chandabai has contributed in Jain literature also. She was a successful writer and editor. She edited a periodical "Jain Mahilodaya" for many years from 1921. She wrote Updesh Ratna Mala, Saubhagya Ratna Mala, Nibandh Ratna Mala, Adarsh Kahaniyan, Adarsh Nibandh, Nibandh Darpan and many other books, which are much useful to women.

She was active towards reforms in society also. Keeping herself in the front position in the creation of literature, Chandabai was enthusiastic for expanding the light of Jainism all over the world. There were news in the periodical Search Light in 1948 that George Bernard Shaw is writing a book titled Awakening of Jainism and the principle of non-violence presented by various Jain saints will be relatively compared with the views of non-violence given by Mahatma Gandhi and this will be an exhaustive critical volume on the subject. Dr. George Bernard Shaw had called Shri Devdas Gandhi, the son of Mahatma Gandhi for this purpose. Chandabai atonce wrote to Sir Sheth Hukamchand, President of Jain Samaj, Sahoo Shantiprasadji, Sheth Bhagchandji, Babu Chhotalaji and others saying that "this work should not remain incomplete merely for want of money and one person who is highly learned in Jainism, spirituality and related subjects having total control over speaking, writing and understanding of English must be sent to Dr. Shaw because Dr. Shaw was an unparalleled writer and the book written by him will be immortal, respected all over the world and shall be considered very authentic. It is very necessary that one Jain learned persons remains in his continuous contact for giving proper perspectives on Jainism, Non-violence and Jain Scriptures". This reveals her love for Jainism and foresightedness in spiritual matters.

Other Events of Her Life:

Pandita Chandabai was addressed as Maa-i.e. mother. She was really kind-hearted.

Once a girl in her Vanita Vishram had a typhoid in 1943. The sickness took serious turn and it developed into pneumonia. The girl was almost unconscious. Arrangements for the doctor and services from other girls were made in advance but when Chandabai knew that the girl was in need of constant attention, she herself remained in her service day and night without eating and drinking. When others told that she need not be constantly with the girl, Chandabai said, "I have total faith that I shall be able to save her by my own services". She remained by the side of the girl for three days and nights without even an hour of sleep and the girl was saved. She was herself sick because of so much strain but she did not mind.

She was always awoken towards religion even in very difficult circumstances. She had no attachment for her body. She was much concerned for the awakening of soul. She was unexpectedly sick on 8 February 1942 and within five-six days she turned serious. She was not able to sit or stand. Even in such serious condition, she carried on her daily worship of three-time Samayik, worship, prayers etc. when she was even more serious, the girls and workers of Bala Vishram were very much taking any injection. Everybody requested Shri Nemichand Jyotishacharya, the head of Bala Vishram to persuade mother Chandabai that there was no objection to accept injection from the religion point of

view, but the mother replied, "Oh learned man, I can understand if other persons talk like this because of attachment and love for the mortal body, but when you also say, so it is surprising. We expected that you will help us in performing our religious rites and prayers. Why should I worry for this unholy body? The soul spiritual bodies since the beginning of time". Mother's reply like this reveals her spiritual awareness and her faith in the power of the advanced soul, say God or the Almighty.

The mother was now entering her old age while working continuously for the humanity. She passed away peacefully on 28 July 1977.

The life of the Mother is the symbol of Jain culture. She was away from worldly pleasures and had accepted the path of renunciation by herself in spite of knowing that it was full of several difficulties. She remained in search of non-violence and truth till the end of her life. She was not only a merciful administrator but a strong penanceful nun. She kept herself engaged in achieving knowledge from all sides. She never wished to be honored by others, she was always available for the services to others. She was, thus, a silent and dedicated servant of humanity. She carried the voice of her age and the women of all religions, sects and beliefs shall take inspiration from the life of this enlightened mother.