

## 17. Dharm Diwakar Shri Chothmalji Maharaj

(Dharm Diwakar means a man who enlightens religion)

### Birth and Childhood:

The Indian soil has always been holy with the footsteps of warriors, Religious Saints, Social Reformers and other leaders. The region of Malva is particularly known for several saints' mendicants in addition to the rulers like brave Vikramaditya, King Bhoj and others. On this Holy Land a son was born to Kesarbai in 1907 at Neemuch City in Madhya Pradesh. His father Gangaramji was a religious, well-behaving family-holder. Many saints, mendicants and nuns used to come to his house very often and hence the members of the family remained in touch with them. The whole family was much pleased with birth of this child. The learned Brahmins and astrologers named the child as Chothmal. There are four meanings of the word Choth and the special features of this name of four letters are as under:

- (1) In the long path for Moksha-Salvation the fourth part after the first three of knowledge, study of scriptures and character is penance and penance wipes out crises of deeds in previous years and also lives.
- (2) In the five major vows, the fourth one is celibacy and it is the highest and most effective instrument in spiritual practices leading to Absolute Bliss.
- (3) In the four sections of Religion, the fourth one is Bhava-i.e. feelings, tendency, trend. This is the main section by which Moksha can be achieved.
- (4) Among the 14 virtues, the fourth virtue is equality; goodness (Samyaktva) the path to salvation begins with Samyaktva as its basis.

### Family:

Chothmalji Maharaj had two brothers and two sisters. Elder brother's name was Kalooram and younger brother was Fatehchand. Navalbai and Sunderbai were the two sisters. At the age of seven, the father of Chothmalji put him to a school for study. The child was very clever and therefore, he did not stop simply at reading and writing but studied Hindi, Urdu, English, Arithmetic and other subjects also. He was fond of reading new books. Since the whole family was godly-minded, Chothmalji who was interested in music also naturally adopted the virtues of discipline, truth, and service to elders.

### Tending towards Detachment with the World:

When Chothmalji was of about 13 years of age, his elder brother Kalooram developed vices of gambling, wine drinking etc. On one night, Kalooram was constantly winning in gambling and hence the opposite-side players killed him. With this incident, the child Chothmalji learnt the lesson that evil habits always lead to evils. Gangaramji, the father of Chothmalji felt a shock with this untimely death of Kalooram and he died in 1894 in spite of day and night services of Chothmalji and his mother Kesarbai. Both the mother and son were very unhappy with these events and they were tending to understand the worthlessness of this world. Mother Kesarbai was deeply unhappy but she had the responsibility to bring up Chothmalji, put him to some work and got him married. She decided in her mind that after this burden is gone, she would adopt Dixa.

When Chothmalji was of 16 years of age, his relatives thought of his marriage and he was married to Mankunvarbai, daughter of Poonamchandji of Pratapgadh (Rajasthan). Chothmalji always desired to earn religious bliss alongwith money. In those days many saints and monks were visiting the city of Neemuch very frequently and Chothmalji and his mother Kesarbai used to see and serve them. One day, the mother Kesarbai expressed her desire of adopting Dixa before Chothmalji and said, "I want to

secure absolute good of my soul" and hearing this, the son, Chothmalji replied, "I appreciate your desire, but I also want to follow you by adopting Dixa". Saying this, Chothmalji requested his mother to grant her consent for the same the mother said, "my son, you are newly married and you must be with your family for some years. You can have Dixa only when you are of appropriate age." Chothmalji replied, "mother, this body is not for enjoying worldly pleasures. It is for penance and restraint. I am determined to adopt Dixa". Seeing her son's strong feelings for Dixa, the mother granted her consent but asked him to obtain consent of his wife Mankunvar also. Chothmalji approached his wife to obtain her consent for Dixa but she did not agree saying that "neither I shall take Dixa, nor shall I allow you to adopt that path". The father-in-law of Chothmalji also was much worried for his daughter and he persuaded Chothmalji not to adopt Dixa. In addition to this, many other relatives, elders and friends tried to persuade Chothmalji not to adopt Dixa, but none could succeed. Replying all of them, Chothmalji said, "Religion cannot be followed in family-life so easily and conveniently as it can be followed after adopting Dixa". Many other relatives further, pressed him upon for turning him back for his determination of adopting Dixa, but he was not moved even a little because he had very well understood the worthlessness of worldly pleasures. In those days Jain saints were not granting Dixa to any one without the consent of his relatives and the Jain Sangh also did not approve such Dixa. The mother and son, therefore, could not adopt Dixa immediately. Chothmalji, however, was eager to have Dixa and seeing this the mother said that if he is ready to accept in a simple and silent way, it can be expedited but if he wanted to adopt Dixa with pomp and celebrations, he would have to wait. Chothmalji accepted to receive Dixa in a simple way and hence he became a disciple of Kavi Varya Hiralalji Maharaj on Sunday in 1896. After two months of Chothmalji's Dixa, his mother Kesarbai also adopted Dixa at the hands of Mahasati Shri Fudiji. Thus, the brave son and brave mother began to seek salvation of their souls.

### **Travelling in Search of Salvation:**

Chothmalji Maharaj who had newly adopted Dixa passed his first monsoon at Neemuch Cantt. He studied the Sootras of Dash Vaikalik and Aupapatik here during these days. He went on studying many other scriptures while moving from place to place.

### **Death of Mother Kesarkunvarbai and Mankunvarbai:**

During the monsoon of 1906 at Ratlam, the Kesarkunvarbai was not keeping well. She, therefore, adopted fast unto death-Santharo and died just on the next day.

While Chothmalji was moving from places to places, his teacher asked him to go to his native place at Pratapgadh and preach his wife of worldly life Shrimati Mankunvarbai. Chothmalji had no attachment for worldly pleasures but he was afraid of being drawn back to family life by his father-in-law and others because of family feeling. Even then, he obeyed the directions of his teacher and went to Pratapgadh. His preaching lecture was fixed in the bazaar. His former wife Mankunvarbai and father-in-law came to know about the arrival of Chothmalji. The father-in-law, however, did not come to hear his preaching but Mankunvarbai had come. She tried to take back Chothmalji to family life and in her further efforts she went to Mandsau, Jaora, and other places. She insisted for seeing Chothmalji at least once and assured that she will do what he liked afterwards. Her desire was accepted and Chothmalji called her in the presence of four-six nuns and some mendicants. She came and asked, "you have adopted celibacy and restrained life of Dixa, now what should I do? How should I pass my life? Whose shelter should I seek?" Chothmalji replied with serious voice, "You and I had worldly relations in many lives but there was no religious-relation between us. Religion is the only true support to live. If you want to accept my say, you also seek shelter of religion and become nun-adopting Dixa. This is the best way for you". The words of a true saint are always much effective. Mankunvarbai was also moved. She requested for Dixa and she became nun in 1911-the day is

celebrated as VijayaDashami. She observed various penances for six years and seeing that her end is very near, she adopted Santharo-i.e. fasting unto death. She expired on the tenth day of the bright half of the month of Shravan in 1917.

Jain Diwakar Maharaj Chothmalji was a believer of Jainism and yet he honored all other sects and religions. He wanted to establish friendship by love and sympathy. He wanted to please others even by suffering pains. He could understand the essence of religion and life very clearly. He was above caste discrimination, regionalism and sect-feelings. He encouraged others to be religious and great. He had courage and sympathy for others and was in habit of being in meditation. He could attract many by his loving attitude to everyone. He had expanded his mind to cover up everything by his practices in meditation and thinking. His personality was much impressive. His activities were worth following.

### **Non-Violence and Self-Restraint:**

Hindus and Mohmedans equally came to hear him. They left their evil habits after hearing his preachings. His contribution for expanding non-violence and development of life was remarkable. He could attract many rulers of Indian states, officers, learned personalities, millionaires, moneylenders and others. Non-violence has most important consideration in Jainism and almost all-religious saints have stressed upon non-violence, mercy, sympathy and friendship. Whenever somebody desired to give some presents to Jain Diwakar Shri Chothmalji Maharaj during his movements from place to place, he used to tell them, "renunciate, extend mercy and behave properly". He went round in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab and many other places and preached non-violence and principles of Jainism.

His speech was magical. He could impress upon the audience very deeply. Many a people changed the way to their life after hearing the preaching of Shri Jain Diwakar Chothmalji. They turned to repent for their misdeeds. He turned prostitutes into gentlewomen. Hunters threw away their hunting arrows and bows. Young men became free from bad habits and turned to serve the society. Atheists began to think of Almighty.

### **A True Saint:**

His speech was simple but piercing. He preferred to speak on simple subjects. The audience could grasp the essence very easily. He spoke from Vedic scriptures, stanzas, phrases, illustrations and Undue poems. His speech was musical and every one liked to hear him. People heard him for hours together. There was satire on evil practices prevailing in society. At time, he was humorous also. People of all religious like Hindus, Mohmedans, Parsis, Christians and all walks of life, rich and poor, old and young, men and women, high family as well as low family people rushed to hear him.

### **A Reformist:**

He has done astonishing work for reforms in society. He stopped child-marriages and advanced age-marriages, dowry, dinners after death, sacrifices of animals to gods and untouchability. He imparted advice to prisoners to be gentlemen after being released from Jail, he spoke against cruelty on animals, he said that prostitutes are as good as black blots on society and many other subjects. His preachings covered all sorts of evils prevailing in society. Society and many other subjects his preachings covered all sorts of evils prevailing in society.

### **Worked for Unity:**

He took unity in society to be of prime importance. He established Mahavir Jain Mandals and Jain Mandals i.e. Jain Committees, at Balotra, Beawar, Piploda, Udaipur and many other places. He started Jainodays Prakashan Samiti at Ratlam and the Samiti published literature relating to religion

and scriptures. He established Jain School for religious learning at Raipur, Delwada, Sanwada, Gogunda etc., Mahila Ashram at Jodhpur, Oswal Nirashrit Fund at Ahmednagar, Samaj Hitaishi Shravak Mandal at Mandsaur, Chaturth Jain Vruddhashram at Chittorgadh and several other institutions.

### **Literary Writer:**

He was a very good writer of high quality religious literature. He wrote both poetry and prose. He has written 30 poems in which 19 are biographical and 11 are collection of religious songs. In reading these poetry, the reader was deeply influenced with religious fervor.

Just as Lord Shri Krishna has given essence of all Vedas and other scriptures in his Geeta, Shri Diwakar Chothmalji Maharaj has complied the preachings of Lord Mahavir by searching into almost all Jain scriptures in his book Nirgranth Pravachan. This is an immortal work given by Chothmalji Maharaj to Jain community. It will inspire all Jains for centuries to come. In addition to this, his own lectures are collected and published in the book named Diwakar Divya Jyoti, which is in 20 parts.

### **A Step forward for Unity:**

Even after adopting Dixa, Chothmalji Maharaj tried his best to unite several sects in Jainism and to achieve this goal, he decided to speak from one stage with Digambar Acharya SurSagarji Maharaj and Shwetambar Moorti Pujak Acharya AnandSagarji Maharaj during the monsoon of 1951 at Kota with a view to establish unity between several sects of Jainism. The effort was mainly successful.

When he was spending his monsoon at Sadadi, he had expressed his views for bringing out unity among different Jain sects before Shri Zaverchandbhai Jadhavji Kamdar, editor of Jain Prakash. His suggestions, in brief, were as under: -

- All saints' mendicants and nuns of all sects should hold combined conference at one place.
- There should be only one system for performing religious rites and all saints, mendicant and nuns of all sects should follow this.
- Sthanakvasi Jain Unions should publish authentic literature of high level.
- None should comment or criticize a member of other sect.
- Festival-days and other days of celebrations are fixed unanimously.

He advised to celebrate the birthday of Lord Mahavir jointly so that unity of several sects is well founded. All Jains belonging to Digambar, Shwetambar, Sthanakvasi and other sects from Ujjain, Ajmer, Agra etc. places met together and celebrated the birthday of Lord Mahavir with all joys and pleasures. This could be possible-with the efforts of Shri Jain Diwakar Chothmalji Maharaj only. This practice continues even to day at several places.

### **Conclusion:**

After Ratlam, the monsoon of 1951 was spent in Kota. This period remained to be a unique in respect of unity of the Jain community. At this time he had pains in his stomach and it continued for 14 days. At last, he passed away on Sunday in 1951. His soul united with the Absolute.

Jain Diwakar Shri Chothmalji Maharaj was a multi-faced personality. He was a famous orator, reformer, revolutionary, believer in unity and a great man of the age. He will go on enlightening us as the sun in the sky for ages to come. His works have been inspiring the whole of Jain community and all Jains are indebted to him forever.