

27. Dharm Prabhavak Shri Kanjswami

(Dharm Prabhavak means a person who could influence religion to a great extent)

Shri Kanjswami was famous as a saint of Songadh. He has been an inspiring force in construction of many Jain temples. He has contributed a lot for the reprint and revision of scriptures written by Shri Kundkundacharya. Personality of Shri Kanjswami was extremely impressive. He was interested in the development of his soul. Everyone who came in his contact was deeply impressed by his spiritual approach and sharp intelligence. He was impressed millions of Jain and non-Jain devotees by his continuous lectures for more than 40 years.

Birth and Childhood:

Kanjswami was born in 1890 at Umralla village of Bhavnagar District in Saurashtra (Gujarat). Shri Motichandbhai and Ujambai were his parents. His family line was Sthanakvasi Jain sect of Dasha Shrimali Baniya (a trader). The child Kahan had religious culture and natural tendency of renunciation. He has lost his parents in his young age and hence he joined with his elder brother to work in a shop at Palej after receiving nominal education at Umralla. In spite of this, his mind never took shop-activities very seriously because by nature he was almost detached from homely affairs. He never missed to go to see any saint or mendicant as soon as he heard him come to Upashraya. He was spending most of his time in spiritual discussions and services to the saints and mendicants. His relatives called him "Bhagat" - i.e. a devotee to religion.

One day he clearly told his elder brother that he did not want to marry and that he had determined to accept Dixa. His brother persuaded him but his detached mind had long back decided to adopt Dixa. He went on to the regions of Kathiawar, Gujarat, Marwar and many other places to find out a teacher-Guru before adopting Dixa and at last Shri Hirachandji Maharaj of Botad sect granted him Dixa in his own native village Umralla in 1914. Kanjswami made deep study of the scriptures of Shwetambar Sthanakvasi branch of Jainism. He became famous throughout Saurashtra with his knowledge and restrained life and many people were drawn to him for his deep learning, exhaustive thinking and his style of preaching and speaking.

Study of Samaysar and Enlightenment:

There was an event in the life of Shri Kanjswami in 1922, which changed the direction of his thinking. He could get the great book Shri Samaysar written by Acharya Kundkund and he was extremely pleased of its study. He thought that he was at last secured what he was searching for since several years. He was deeply impressed of Samaysar and it brought major change in his line of thinking. After this in 1926 he could read "Moksha Marg Prakashak" written by Shri Todarmaji and this re-inforced his new line of thinking.

Shri Kanjswami moved in many villages as a mendicant of Sthanakvasi Jain sect and tried to explain the essence of Jainism to the people. He used to stress upon the success of right thinking, reading and studying in all his preaching. He said that falsehood was a much greater sin than the killing of millions and one cannot have good behavior without good thinking and reading. He himself believed in his preachings very firmly.

In 1935 on the birthday of Lord Mahavir, Kanjswami relinquished his position of a mendicant of Sthanakvasi Jain sect and this change became the basis for the changes to come in future. With this change there was serious protest against him in Sthanakvasi sect but he remained unmoved like the mountain Meru. He adopted Digambar sect of Jainism and declared himself as a Digambar Jain Shravak. He said that he has made this change of the principles of truth. After this change, Kanjswami made Songadh village of Saurashtra to be his permanent place of residence. Kanjswami

had to face serious opposition and difficulties for his change but at last his disciples and followers thought Kanjishwami must have changed himself with deep thinking and understanding and they then submitted him with deep reverence as before. As the time passed many born Digambar Jains were attracted to him because of his knowledge and deep study. They became his devotees and ardent lovers. They were all impressed by his internal and outward personality. His speech was deeply spiritual, philosophical and piercing. Many people started coming to Songadh to hear him from distant places and there was a big class of his followers. The small village Songadh turned into an important place of pilgrimage for Jains. Then a grand Jain temple, a branch temple of Simandhar persons were constructed at Songadh and these are worth seeing even today.

Shri Kanjishwami had unparalleled deep interest in Yogishwar Shri Kundkundacharya and the scriptures written by him like Samaysar, Pravachansar, Niyamsar, Panchastikaya and others. Kanjishwami delivered several lectures on these scriptures in big cities like Rajkot, Mumbai, Songadh etc. His lectures were full of spiritual fervor. He considered Samaysar to be the best book on Jainism and he strongly believed that every stanza of Samaysar would lead to Moksha-Salvation.

The style of preaching of Kanjishwami was unique. He spoke with force on spirituality and philosophical aspects of religion. He enlightened the soul or greater soul (Parmatma) in his speeches. Many learned personalities were attracted to him because of his people, learning and speeches. His speeches were considered to be revolutionary.

Many Sthanakvasi Shwetambar Jains had adopted Digambar sect of Jainism with the influence of Kanjishwami and consequently as many as 6` Digambar Jain temples were constructed in Saurashtra, Gujarat and many other states. Many scriptures were published under the inspiration of Shri Kanjishwami and many more were translated into Gujarati prose and also poetry. A monthly periodical titled Atma Dharm was published in Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi and Kannad languages. Several publication houses like Kundkund Kahan Jain Shashtramala, Songadh, Pandit Todarmal Smarak Trust, Jaipur were created for publication of Jain scriptural literature. There was extensive advancement of Digambar view of Jainism under the inspiration of Shri Kanjishwami. The devotees were led to perform religious rites regularly and self-study camps were arranged at several places. One class of learned persons came up at Songadh and Jaipur and a system was established to prepare new teachers of Jainism in Digambar sect. Shri Kanjishwami extensively traveled all over India to see holy places of Jainism and had inspired many persons to take part in religious rites and study philosophical aspects of Jainism. Shri Kanjishwami had the credit of construction of many Jain temples; he published Jain literature of high quality and preached the people on the principles of Jainism. He passed whole of his life in the service of Jainism and Jain community. He was constantly in efforts to create attraction of many devotees towards the study of Jain scriptures. At last he had to be admitted to Jashlok Hospital Mumbai because of his sickness and to expired in that hospital on November 28, 1980 after living a long life of 91. The Digambar sect of Jainism lost a great saint in the demise of Shri Kanjishwami.