

30. Gnanoddharak Mooni Shri PunyaVijayaji

(Gnanoddharak means up-holder of learning and knowledge)

Introduction:

The best way to see the self and the world in its true form is devotional, selfless and pure leaning without any pretence. And hence, there arise such circumstances when efforts to achieve truth and knowledge meet together and make him without rivalry, fear, violence and full of love, piety mercy and other virtues. The great mendicant, knowing most of the scriptures respectable Mooni Shri PunyaVijayaji made so deep efforts to achieve truth and knowledge that his life becomes an ideal for all of us. His detachment was not, therefore, lifeless or unmeaningful but full of pleasure and fearlessness. His practices to touch the highest ends of truth and knowledge fulfilled the stanza; "A mind full of pleasure is the reward of deep devotion". He always worshipped the great soul internally as well as outs worldly and made his lie full of Sat, ehit and Anand-truth, knowledge and pleasure. Mooni Ratna (a jewel among the mendicants) knowledge was such a spiritual personality of Gujarat. His works of expanding knowledge and learning with a view to make the stocks of scriptural heritage immortal and permanent makes him every-living with all of us.

Birth, Native Place and Parents:

He was born in 1896, the day for the worship of knowledge at Kapadwanj town of Gujarat. His child name was Manilal. Shri Dahyabhai Doshi and Shrimati Manekben were his parents. The mother Manekben was very much turned to religion. There was hardly any learning for girls before about 75 years and yet Manekben had studied up to sixth standard and learnt of five Pratikraman (religious rite), thinking about soul and nine elements i.e. Jiva Vichar and Nava Tattvas. Manekben had five children but only one survived and that also was critically saved. The town Kapadwanj where Maharaj Shri was born, was also a religious town. The people were of the nature of renunciation, detachment and restraint. Many religious brothers and sisters of this town had adopted Dixa and walked on the way to salvation. In the present age, there were two able persons who worked hard to save the books of scriptures and the honor of giving these two persons to go the town Kapadwanj. These two respected persons are Shri SagarNand Sooriji Maharaj and Shri PunyaVijayaji Maharaj. There is hardly a Jain family at Kapadwanj from which at least one person has not taken Dixa. Thus, the native town of Mooni Shri PunyaVijayaji is place where three rivers of renunciation, detachment and penance meet together and it has also become the cause to lead Maharaj Shri PunyaVijayaji on the path of renunciation and restraint.

As the financial condition of the family was not good, the father Dahyabhai was staying at Mumbai while Manekben was bringing up her children staying alone at Kapadwanj. When Manilal (Maharaj Shri PunyaVijayaji) was of hardly 2-4 months of age, his mother Manekben had gone to wash clothes at the riverside, leaving Manilal asleep in the cradle. At that time there was serious firebreak out and the house of Manekben also was caught into it. Hearing the news of firebreak out, one Vohra-gentleman came running. He heard the child crying. He was lead by the feelings of humanity and ran into the burning house. He took out the child safely and put it at his own house. When Manekben heard the matter of firebreak out at the river, she rushed home and saw that the house was totally burnt to derbies. She thought that her only child who would keep the family line undisturbed was also taken away by God. She was extremely taken up with unbearable grief. The Vohra-gentleman thought that the parents of the child would soon come to take the child but nobody came till evening. The Vohra-gentlemen was noble hearted and saw that the child was from a Hindu family and hence he obtained water from a Hindu and the child drank it. The child was given the milk of a goat. No one came to receive the child even at night and hence the Vohra-gentleman started inquiry for the parents

of the child in the morning next day. At last Manekben got her son safe and sound. There were no limits to her pleasure. Manilal got the protection of the Lord Rama in the form of that Vohra-gentleman. Hearing this, Dahyabhai came to Kapadwanj and took away the wife and son Manilal to Mumbai. Then, Manilal got his primary education at there.

But then the future of the mother and son was to take a different turn and nature indicated something unexpected. Shri Dahyabhai suddenly expired and Manekben was widow at the age of only 26. She was non-plus and there was no way before her. But she was the one who had tried to follow religion in her life and in these days of extreme hardships she preferred to keep following the religious piety. She realized the futility of life. Her mind and heart longed detachment with the world but the 14 year-old Manilal was in her way. What to do of him? Where to sent him? The mother thought that if I leave this worldly life, why should Manilal be kept in this hopeless world? Ultimately it was decided that both the mother and son should adopt Dixa.

Dixa, Dixa-Teacher, and Study of Religion:

At last Manilal adopted Dixa in 1909 at Chhani near Vadodara as a disciple of MooniVarya Shri Chaturvijayji. He was named as PunyaVijayaji. After only two days of Manilal's Dixa, his mother Manekben also adopted Dixa at Palitana in the group of Shri Mohanlalji Maharaj and she was named as Shri Ratnashreeji. The grandfather-teacher of Mooni Shri PunyaVijayaji, Shri Kantivijayaji Maharaj was an ideal Shraman (devoted to spirituality). He was fully turned to non-violence, restrained life of penance and truth, and as the grand-father teacher was broad hearted, so was his teacher Shri Chaturvijayji Maharaj. He was devoted to his spiritual daily routine, courteous in behavior and continuously in the service of scriptural literature. Thus, the grandfather-teacher as well as the teacher was both devoted to the search of knowledge and expansion of knowledge.

After Dixa, Mooni Shri PunyaVijayaji had only further study and research in scriptures writes in this matter, "There was much less in my life that I studied one and the same subject continuously for long. I studied with concentrated mind for several years and then started reading ancient books with research in old scriptures. This was, as if, for the reason of impressions of previous lives, exceptional favor of my elders, or loss of deeds creating bondage on soul. And thus, study and research went on simultaneously with each other. Work teaches work. While reading and researching into the scriptures, I continued to gain knowledge in new subjects. The roots underneath were extraordinary and unstained intelligence, heart-felt desire to reach the truth and eagerness to know the subjects in depth. During the first year of his Dixa, Mooni Shri PunyaVijayaji studied many great books under the immediate guidance of grandfather teacher and the teacher. The basis for deep study of scripture was, thus, laid down very firmly. In the next year, he studied Margopadeshika with Shri Bhailalbhai, an ardent Shravak of Vaso and on completion, he studied Siddh-Hem-Laghu-Vritti, Hem-Laghu-Prakriya, ChandraPrabha Grammar, Hitopadesh, Dashkumar charit and other scriptures under Shri Nityanand Shastri, He studied Kavyanushasan, Tilak Manjuri, Tark Sangrah and Chhandanushasan under Pandit Sukhlalji Sanghvi. He learnt many other things of his own alongwith these studies. He continued translation and research in scriptures with his studies and Pandit Sukhlalji had a very great contribution and help in all these achievements.

Maharaj Shri himself writes for Pandit Sukhlalji, "Pandit Sukhlalji is my great teacher in spiritual study and the teacher is an important person on the foot-steps for the progress in life. I have had many teachers, learned mendicants, family-holder teaches and others but only two personalities are of my deep-most respects. They are Shri Chaturvijayji Maharaj and Pandit Shri Sukhlalji Sanghvi. Maharaj Shri Chaturvijayji was the editor of Shri Jain Atmanand Granth Ratna Mala, the savor of the stocks of knowledge in the form of books and a dedicated person for the expansion of spiritual fervor all around. Pandit Sukhlalji taught me with personal feelings and has given me such knowledge by speech, which can never be obtained from books.

Mooni Shri PunyaVijayaji served the Jain community by expanding, saving and preserving the ancient scriptures. If he could get some hand-written letters or if he is placed in the library of hand-written books, he would not mind to eat or drink even water and continue its study day and night without rest. He was as good as a mendicant under deep meditation at that time. It was a happy moment to see him under this condition.

Mooni Shri PunyaVijayaji has worked of his own in various fields of expansion of knowledge. It is surprising that he could do such a huge work by his own. We cannot appreciate or evaluate his work in words. The learned personalities in India and abroad will realize the greatness of his work as the time passes. His works can be briefly summarized as under: -

He examined and organized the stocks of books at Limbdi, Patan, Khambhat, Vadodara, Bhavnagar, Palitana, Ahmedabad and several places in Gujarat-Saurashtra and Rajasthan with the help of grandfather teacher and his teacher. He has prepared lists of such books at some places. Some detailed lists were also got printed. At several places, he arranged for cupboards, boxes, shelves and separate rooms for these books and copies of very high scriptural importance. He saved some stocks from vanishing. He had worked continuously for 16 months to preserve the stocks at Jesalmer. As there were many difficulties, so there were voluntary helpers also. He established Bharatiya Sanskriti Vidya Mandir and Maharaj Shri gave over thousands of hand-written and printed books as a present to this Mandir. This is an evidence of the greatness of Maharaj Shri PunyaVijayaji.

Progress in the Research Work of Scriptures:

The scriptural phrases are the lifeline of Jain religion and culture. Maharaj Shri PunyaVijayaji studied scriptures in the modern style and revised their readings. He took up about 45 great books for study one by one and critically studied them. He then took help of 2-3 writers and prepared new editions and commentaries of these books. He had no money to pay these writers but he did not ask for money to anybody. In 1947-48, Sheth Shri Kasturbhai Lalbhai of Ahmedabad came to know this. He examined the work of Mooni Shri PunyaVijayaji and paid the dues of the writers. He also requested Mooni Shri to continue his work. The readings of these scriptures were last prepared 1500 years ago at Vallabhipur under the guidance of Shri Devarddhi Gani Kshama Shraman and now these were reviewed and revised by Mooni Shri PunyaVijayaji. Two of these books, viz. Nandi-Sootram with its original text and Nandi-Sootram with various comments have been published in 1966-68. He has been appropriately addressed as Agam Prabhakar in appreciation of his great works like these. Mooni Shri PunyaVijayaji had handed over all the money, which were received at Kapadwanj celebrations, Vadodara celebrations and Mumbai chaturmaas Parivartan for the publication of scriptural books. He reorganized various stocks of scriptural books as under:

- To preserve the hand-written books.
- To prepare informative lists of these books.
- To arrange for providing these copies to the studying intellectuals and students in India and abroad and ensure its best use for the purpose.
- Arranged the pages of these books in chronological order and used some medicines and chemicals so that these can be well preserved without being damaged by white-ants and other insects.
- He obtained ancient books, ancient and modern pictures, art-pieces, art-material of wood or metal, small idols hand-written books containing pictures, preserved them and classified them so that the same can be provided to research scholars for study.

He did all this work with his own intuition and inspiration of Shri Vijaya Nemi Soorishwarji Maharaj, Shri Kantivijayaji Maharaj, Shri Chaturvijayji Maharaj, Shri Vijaya Dharm Soorishwarji Maharaj and others. These personalities helped him also at several occasions.

Appreciation of His Works:

The great works of Mooni Shri PunyaVijayaji were appreciated very well during his lifetime:

- He was appointed as examiner of thesis written for Ph.D. degree in archeology.
- He was elected to be the President of archeology-history department at Gujarati Sahitya Parishad in 1959.
- The Jain community of Bhavnagar had awarded him gold medal, the Vadodara Sangh had awarded him the title of Agam Prabhakar and Mumbai community of Worli had granted them the honors of "Shrut Sheel Varidhi" at the hands of Shri Vijaya Samudra Soori Maharaj.
- He was made an honorary member of American Oriental Society in 1970.

Last Days:

He did not mind his health in his studies. He has held by piles in the monsoon of 1955. It became very acute and he suffered very much for one and a half years. He, however, continued to work on edition Katha Ratna Kosh and study of Nishithchoorni. His devotion, knowledge and peace of mine were exceptional. At last on Monday, the sixth day of the dark half of the month of Jyeshtha in 1971, corresponding to June 14, '71 he prayed last after performing Pratikraman (religious rite) at about 8.50 hours night and as if he was adopting Santharo (fasting unto death) he breathed his last within two four minutes while talking with Shri Laxmanbhai. He was at peace till the last minute. He had no pains nor had he any attachments with the world. He was a great person of total renunciation.

Conclusion:

This saint of self-practices was a concrete idol of Anekantvad. He had sharpened his intelligence with the study of scriptures. His Dixa life of 62 years was an uninterrupted journey for religious deeds. He lived a life of true and dedicated intellectual and yet he was a student unto his death. The world lost a saint, the Jain community lost an ideal devotee and the world of literature lost a dedicated student. We have lost an invaluable jewel from humanity. But now what remains with us? We shall remember him in his works and draw inspiration from his life.