

## 15. Great Poet Shri Nanchandraji Maharaj

Sympathy for all living beings, poetic ability since birth, singing devotional songs in sweet voice, natural tendency to help others and equal respect for all religions were the principal virtues of Shri Nanchandraji Maharaj. He spread the message for religious awareness in Western India for more than five decades.

### Introduction:

The Saurashtra region of Western India has given many saints, brave warriors and benevolent personalities to the country. There is a village named Sayla in the Zalawad (presently Surendranagar) district and there happened to be a saint named Lala Bhagat so that this village is often known as Bhagat NA Gam -a village of a saint, Shri Nanchandraji was born in 1877 in this village. His childhood name was Nagarbhai. Shri Panachandbhai and Shrimati Raliatbai were his parents. This was a Dasha Shrimati Bania family (a sect in merchant's community) devoted to God and good behavior believing in Sthanakvasi branch of Jainism. Nagarbhai lost his mother at the age of five years and father when he was only 11. As such, his brother's wife Monghibai brought up as her own child. As this was not enough, his brother Jesangbhai also passed away very shortly and Monghibai was a widow. At this time some news was received indicating that the girl with whom Nagarbhai's marriage was fixed, has been changed over by some other girl and then both Monghibai and Nagarbhai were very unhappy. Nagarbhai lost interest in worldly matters and in spite of long persuading by elders and others, he went on being more and more detached with the world. He was now passing his days in reading religious books and was keeping in the company of saints and mendicants. He decided to adopt Dixa if a suitable great teacher is available. At this time, he happened to meet Shri Popatbhai Hansraj of Limbdi and he advised Nagarbhai to approach Shri Devchandraji Maharaj. Both Shri Popatbhai and Nagarbhai, therefore, came to Kutchchha via Vagad. Here, they were impressed with Darshan (seeing) and preachings of Maharaj Shri Devchandraji. Nagarbhai then adopted in 1901 at the famous place of Anjar where Saint couple Jesal and Toral had buried themselves alive in the honor of God. Shri Devchandraji gave new name to Nagarbhai and he was now said to be Mooni Nanchandra.

He passed some monsoons at Mandvi (Kutchchha), Jamnagar and Morbi. During these days he propagated that there was no objection if a Jain mendicant sings loudly the songs of national interest and also the prayers of Lord Mahavir. This was a great reform that Nanchandraji adopted for himself and he, therefore, became famous as revolutionary Jain mendicant in Kutchchha and Saurashtra.

### Service to Teacher and Learning of Scriptures:

Paralysis and the young mendicant Mooni Nanchandra decided to stay with him for his service now affected his Dixa-teacher Shri Devchandra Maharaj. He had, thus, to stay at Limbdi for a very long period of nine years from 1912 to 1920. During these years he learned by himself with his own intuitional power most of the books in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Scriptures and poetics. In addition to this, he used his time for creation of literature and service to society so that he was much popular in the Jain Sangh. In spite of all services of Mooni Shri Nanchandraji and members of the Jain Sangh Shri Devchandraji Maharaj passed away in 1921 after severe hit of paralysis. Shri Nanchandraji was unhappy his Dixa-guru was here. He, then, shortly went to Sayla and adopted fast for three days with staying in seclusion in a cellar in the condition of meditation. Severe cold and wet weather severely affected him and he was caught with the disease of rheumatism and gout. But Mooni Nanchandraji had formed habit of neglecting body and his tolerance was under test now.

### Attraction of Mumbai-Residents:

Mooni Shri Nanchandra had attractive personality, his speech was poetic, his outlook was very broad, his voice was sweet but loud, he was a reformist, he was eager to see the development of society. All these virtues made him famous and the Mumbai Sangh continuously invited him to spend some monsoons at Mumbai. At last Mooni Shri Nanchandra passed his rainy season of 1926 at Ghatkopar, Mumbai. The number of audience in his lectures indicated as to how many Jains had come to Mumbai from Saurashtra and Kutchchha. In this monsoon, a foundation stone was laid for construction of a grand building of Sthanakvasi Upashraya: Sthanakvasi is a branch of Jainism and Upashraya means a place of worship, meditation and performing religious rites. Shri Nanchandraji Maharaj also addressed All India Sthanakvasi Jain Conference here.

The monsoon of 1927 was passed in Limbdi. Shri Chunilalji Mooni was granted Dixa here in these days. Then the monsoon of 1928 was spent in Vankaner. In 1929, Shri Shivilalji (Santbalji) was granted Dixa at Morbi. The monsoon of 1933 was decided to be spent in Agra. During this interval of time Shri Nanchandraji represented the Limbdi sect of Jainism in the Conference held at Ajmer. He passed the four months of monsoon of the 1937 at KandaVadi. Two more monsoons were spent at Borivli. During these years, he did several works of bringing awareness in religion, social up-lift and services to common people. The Jains residing at Borivli in those days belonged to poor and medium classed but they were deeply devoted to Jainism. They were united and worked with one voice on all-important issues. It was for this reason that Shri Nanchandraji Maharaj could do very good work for religious awareness, youth activities and women-associations.

### **Last Three Monsoons and Sickness:**

After completing the monsoon of 1958, Shri Nanchandraji Maharaj arrived at Vajeshwari with a view to go towards the native places. There was good accommodation for stay and sanitation here but during his one and a half months stay here his health did not remain good. He was badly suffering from colds and gout. It was decided to go back to Borivli under the advice of the doctor so that better treatment can be given to him. Hearing the news of sickness of Maharaj Shri Nanchandraji, MahaSatiji Hansakumari and others came to Borivli via Vajeshwari travelling from Ahmedabad. There was no time to reach to native place to pass monsoon of 1959 there and the Jain community of Borivli pressed upon Maharaj Shri to pass this monsoon in Borivli itself. He stayed in a building named Krushnakung during this monsoon with a view to pass time in loneliness and peace. Maha Satijis (i.e. nuns) passed their monsoon in Ghatkopar. Maharaj Shri had a mild heart attack during his stay here but he recovered with the efforts of the doctors. After recovery, Maharaj Shri started his travel towards Gujarat. The whole group reached Limbdi in due course. He had another mild heart attack near Viramgam but he recovered slowly and he began to take interest in Library, Pathshala (religious school), school and also preaching lectures. After finishing four months here, Maharaj Shri Nanchandraji started towards Sayla. This was to be his last journey.

### **Steady Stay and Last Days at Sayla:**

Maharaj Shree did his last four monsoons at Sayla. His 87<sup>th</sup> birthday was celebrated here in their presence of Respected Santbalji, Chunilalji, MahaSatijis-nuns and Shravaks (Jain family holders) with deeply devoted songs, prayers, and lectures on religion and meditation. After this Santbalji Maharaj went away for Delhi and Calcutta (Bhavanipura) to pass the next monsoons but for Shri Chitmoon, Gurudev, i.e. Maharaj Shri Nanchandraji was everything and so he stayed with him. Many persons, devotees, followers, disciples, nuns etc. continued to come over here to have Darshan (Seeing) of Maharaj Shri Nanchandraji.

At last it was the day for long journey to heaven. On in 1965 he did morning prayers and preached his intimate disciples. He completed his morning activities and finished Pratikraman (worship rite) also. He however could not sit in the evening prayers. He complained of pains in his chest. Soon his

breathing took high speed. A doctor was called at once from the nearest town Surendranagar but before the doctor could arrive, Maharaj Shri had decided to go to the mercy of the four, viz. Arihant, Siddha, Saints and the religion prescribed by Kevli-i.e. Jainism and breathed last at night at 10-25 hours to begin his journey to the Absolute.

The news of this sad demise of Maharaj Shri Nanchandraji spread very soon in all directions and people from Saurashtra, Gujarat, Mumbai and Hyderabad rushed to see him last. There were more than 10,000 persons in this small village. He was cremated amidst the repeated sounds of "Jay Jay Nanda, Jay Jay Bhadra" in the presence of his disciples, devotees and followers. His bright body was mixed up with five major elements of earth, water, light, wind and space. Maharaj Shri had lived long life of 64 years with total restraint and expanded religion and virtues of good behavior, non-addition, humanity, prayers, truth and sympathy among the Jains and non-Jains communities all around in Gujarat, Saurashtra, Mumbai and many other places.

Maharaj Shri Nanchandraji had granted Dixa to Mooni Shri Chunilalji in 1927 and Mooni Shri Santbalji in 1929. Both of them were totally devoted to Maharaj Shri Nanchandraji. Even after 60 years of his Dixa, Shri Chunilalji Maharaj is following the ideals of Maharaj Shri Nanchandraji, while the personality of Mooni Shri Santbalji was revolutionary and hence while following the rules of his daily life, he was lead by the ideas of world-brotherhood and turned to the feelings of nationality, Indian culture, thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi and development of society. His whole life reveals his thoughts and his activities. In his Ashram at Chinchana, he established four divisions of Shrimad Rajchandra, Mahatma Gandhiji, Respected Shri Nanchandraji and Pandit Jawaharlalji. Thus, the two ardent disciples of late Maharaj Shri Nanchandraji, Shri Chunilalji Maharaj and Shri Santbalji Maharaj carried on the thoughts of their great teacher Shri Nanchandraji Maharaj by their activities and, thus, paid him a befitting homage.

Maharaj Shri Nanchandraji had the power to create effective poems from his childhood and he had special practices in prayers and religious rites. He composed about 400 songs of prayers and devotion deeply related to the religion. The songs are in different poetic metres, they are rhythmic and every one likes to recite them with pleasure. These songs are published in the books "Prarthana Mandir" (Temple of Prayers) and "Subodh SangitMala" (Preachings in songs)-parts 1, 2 and 3. He wrote and compiled three parts of "Sanskrit Kavyanand" (Pleasure poetry in Sanskrit) and "Manavatanu Mithu Jagat" (Sweet world of humanity). His teachings can be summarized as under:

- Life and Wealth: Money is for human life; life is not for money. The beauty of the world is merely an illusion. Body and ornaments have no real value. It is madness to run after wealth by degrading your soul.

Let there be light of humanity in your heart and maintain it by constantly remembering the God. Is it good to go round in business day and night like a bull of oil-seeds crusher, to increase the family, to worry for them, to suffer many hardships for them and at last to go away leaving everything here itself? Why is life? Why have you come here? Where from have you come? Where are you to go from here? What will you take with you? Who are we? What are we doing? Think of all these questions whenever you are free.

Always be in the company of saints and teachers. Go on reading good books. This is the way to eternal bliss. Otherwise, all these scenes before your eyes are vain. Every man has some or other defects, but one must accept and appreciate virtues. Tell all the members of your family to be remembering god at all times.

Always keep in efforts to be before the god. Think of god, read about god, see god every where and hear the praises of god. Spend more time in thinking than in reading. Go on reducing your attachment, be serviceable to everyone, keep your speech and thoughts under control. Always be gracious, kind, helpful, love-all living beings, he devoted to god and makes prayers everyday.

Development in life is the essence and aim of life. Good thinking is the first step towards development and good learning will drive you to good thinking. See that you do not misuse your understanding, talent, power, means and money. Your soul experiences fear because it remains in the company of evil-minded persons. Your soul is really eternal and all pervading. You must know it well and lead it on to the path of Absolute Bliss-salvation. Such a person only wins over his death.

Always be watchful against vices. Keep yourself engaged in prayers, meditation, good deeds and good thinking. Do Pratikraman (devotional rite) everyday and go to sleep while muttering the phrases in adoration of God. There is great power in repeating and muttering the names of God and eternal phrases of religion but the only condition is that you should do this with total faith and sincerity. Behave well with everyone. Your behavior must be open, clean and free from pretence. It must be aimed to do well of all. Always take advantage of your experiences. Never be disheartened, pessimistic or helpless. Keep yourself in pleasure. Keep your mind cheerful at all times.

We hardly try for self-experience. We simply like to hear and read. We are afraid of acting because we have no faith in ourselves. You need to search in yourself and then only you will get something and be able to give something. You must be free from pride. Some are proud of their wealth, some of their learning, some of their family, some of their prestige and so on. This will lead you downwards. You must destroy pride if you want to march to be perfect.

The following institutions were established with the inspiration of Maharaj Shri Nanchandraji:

- Sthanakvasi Jain Vidyarthi Bhavan, Limbdi in 1914: A Boarding house for students.
- Shri Devchandraji Sarvajani Pustakalaya, Limbdi: A library:

Maharaj Shri had more than 7,000 books and he gave over all these books to this library. Sheth Shri Amulakhbhai contributed very much gracefully for this library and the library could be expanded to be a great library for everybody. It was opened for public in 1947. The Library has been awarded many prizes as the best library of Gujarat.

- Shri Nanchandraji Sarvajani Mahila Mandal, Limbdi, established in 1947. The institution works for all round development of women, particularly for their education and opportunities of employment. The activities have been widely appreciated.
- Institutions at Borivli: Upashraya of Sthanakvasi Jain Sangh, a Hospital, an Industrial Centre and a Store for selling religious material.
- Respected Nanchandraji Primary School, Sayla established in 1953.

In addition to this, many institutions were started with his inspiration and encouragement at Ahmedabad, Surendranagar, Sayla, Jamnagar, Ghatkopar, Mandvi-Kutchchha and many other places for social and educational activities. The society is ever grateful to him for his works.

Thus, Maharaj Shri Nanchandraji had spent whole of his life for the welfare of the society. He could know his times very well. He had unusual power of understanding things. He was a great saint mendicant, well-known singer of religion songs and prayers. He was a spiritual poet. The society is indebted to him for all times, now and hence.