

04. The Great Scholar Shri Lalan

The year 1857 AD was critical year for India. There were severe conflicts, excitement and transition of powers. The British were strongly determined to establish their power over India on permanent basis while, the Indians, especially in armed forces, had deep dissatisfaction against the British rule.

During this extremely disturbed time, a son child was born to the couple Shri Kapurchandbhai and Monghibai on April 1, 1857 in a small village Kutchh Mandvi in western India. The child did not cry at the time of its birth as other children do. This was quite surprising and the mother Monghibai was very much pleased to see this child of smiling face. The child was named Fatehchand.

The history of Lalan generation is very bright. In 1817, two sons were born in the house of Ravji Thakore in NagarParker. They were named as Lalan and Lakhahir. The generation was named as Lalan (Lalan Gotra) on the basis of first son Lalan. There have been many brave, charitable and religion personalities in this Gotra and our hero of this narration, Fatehchand was also born of this Gotra.

Childhood and Education:

Fatehchand grew up as the moon in bright half. The father, Kapurchandbhai had to stay at Jamnagar during two-three years of Fatehchand's childhood. As the primary teaching in a village-school was about to be over, the father had to come to Mumbai for business purposes. Hence, Fatehchand studied at Bombay upto non-metric. Even though he failed in matriculation examination, he did continue his studies under the streetlights as the family was poor. Fatehchand studied Sanskrit, Prakrit, English, other European languages, living and non-living elements, various religions, Philosophy, Yoga etc., very deeply. He could understand and remember Shlokas and Mantras-religious and philosophical hymns- very quickly. He was, thus, born in Kutchh, brought up in Saurashtra and studied in Bombay. He was brave and adventurous as the people of Kutchh, ambitions as the people of Saurashtra and sympathetic and broad minded as the people of Mumbai.

Since the family was not so happy financially, Fatehchand had to borrow books from libraries. He had the skill to explain difficult things to others very easily and so he became very successful and famous as a teacher. He had deep study, intricate thinking, simple nature, high culture and company of highly learned personalities. He very shortly became known as Pandit Lalan. Before reaching the age of 25, he had completed study of theosophy and all the Indian scriptures. He was also a great orator. His speeches were full with high thinking and knowledge and hence people were always eager to hear his lectures. He became famous for his speeches all around.

A Religious Shravak:

According to prevailing practice, Fatehchand was married at the age of about 20 to Monghibai, a daughter of Shri Jethabhai Hansraj. Fatehchand was now residing at Lalwadi, Bombay in one room and was working as a teacher. His life was simple, thinking was very high, and behavior was sympathetic. He proved to be an ideal teacher. His father wanted to take him to business

but Fatehchand had decided to dedicate his life to the service of Saraswati-the goddess of learning and for the good of the society. As a teacher, his salary was Rs. 10 per month, but soon he became famous as a very great learned man and he could earn Rs. 300 per month by way of tuitions and other services. He could not live very freely.

He had a daughter named Ujam and she was married at Sihor town. Ujam, however, died shortly and Monghibai, her mother was deeply pained of this ultimately death. Worldly pleasures did not attract him. He was deeply interested in religious literature and at that age of 39 he proposed to observe total celibacy with his wife Monghibai, which she accepted with pleasure.

Pandit Lalan Abroad:

Born a teacher and educationist, vast reading, attractive speech, a celibate, knowing many languages, ability to explain his own views, power to make a dull subject very interesting and an effective orator, he became popular among the people of all walks of life. Shri Veerchand Gandhi had gone to Chicago as a representative of the Jain Religion at the most famous world Religion Conference and Shri Fatehchand Lalan had also gone there within a week. He stayed in America for about four and a half years. He imparted knowledge of Indian culture and main principles of Jainism to the Indians and Americans during his stay there. He established institution named Mahavir Brotherhood. Shri Warron, J.L. Jaini, Alexander Gordon and other prominent persons co-operated with him. This institute published several books written by Pandit Lalan. Again in 1936 AD, at the age of 79, Pandit Lalan attended All Religion Conference held at London as a representative of Acharya Shri VijayVallabh Sooriji. He stayed therefore about seven months and propagated Jainism as well as Yoga in England and other European countries.

Contribution of Knowledge to Mother-Land:

On his return from America, Pandit Lalan stayed for months together at Nagalpur near Kutchh Koday and many villages of Saurashtra. He taught Yoga and Jainism to the people of this region. He stressed upon the practice of Samayik (religions rite of meditation), love towards all living beings in the world, to live a truthful and honest life, dedication for the service of society, need of simplicity for successful human life, sympathetic nature, need for high thinking. People from all walks of life including children, young, old, rich, poor, women, learned, ignorant from all castes and religions took advantage of his learning.

He used to go to deliver lectures on religion in various regions of the country and several meetings were arranged at Mumbai, Hoobli, Gadag, Jamnagar, Songadh, Palitana, Ahmedabad, Agas, Vadva (Khambhat), Sangli etc. His wife died in 1918 AD and he stayed for sometime in Lalan Niketan at Madhala, but he mainly resided in Ahmedabad and villages of Saurashtra, especially around Jamnagar. He spent his last days with Parvatiben. Even though he could not see well with his eyes, he carried on his activities by intuition. He breathed his last on December 7, 1953 while praying Panch Parameshthi. He lived a long life of 96 years. To prayer meeting and, Atthai celebrations were held in Jamnagar.

Some Important Events:

Some notable events and information touching the life of Pandit Lalan is likely to be useful to a practitioner of religion and yoga.

Thirst for knowledge in young age:

Mumbai was not over-crowded than one hundred years ago. Shri Lalan used to come a long distance with heavy bundle of books up to the bridge of Masjid Bandar and read books on the public road side in the light of municipal lamp till late at night. He was coming there so regularly. When if he did not go therefore a day or two, the watchmen were worried for him. Thus, even the common men had much sympathy and attachment for him. He learnt the lessons of human love and principles of religion. He tried to implement this learning in his own life and it made him so great and famous.

One day a new sepoy came on the bridge in his daily routine duty. He saw the boy Fatehchand studying his books very deeply. He asked, "Brother, where do you stay?"

"Sir! I stay at Lalwadi."

"Do you come here on foot?"

"Yes, I come on foot and go also on foot."

"Are you poor?"

"No, but I have interest in reading and so I come here for reading in peace".

"Brother, do not be afraid. If it is too late, I shall come with you to put you at your home".

"No, I am never afraid. I can go home at any time."

So much fearlessness! So deep desire for knowledge! So good behavior! And so much peace of mind!

He, thus, studied at the public lamppost and he became a lamppost for others.

Lalan Saheb was not much attached to worldly things. He was as simple as a child. He was humorous. One day, he left one of his books in a train in America. He atonce talked to the station-master and said that the book does not bear his name but "Sarvesham" i.e. this book belongs to all. The book could be secured very soon and the stationmaster was much-pleased.

Be Optimistic:

One American woman arranged a party of friends with a view to meets and talk with Lalan Saheb. On one side there was a chair and table for Lalan Saheb and there were inkpot, pen and paper on the table. There was also a costly mattress on the floor for some to seat. Many other chairs were also arranged for sitting. Many friends had come there to hear Lalan Saheb. Before Lalan Saheb could begin with his lecture, somebody's hand struck with the inkpot and the whole inkpot fell on the beautiful and costly carpet. It was spoiled very badly. The American woman had tears in her eyes as her costly mattress was so much spoiled. Lalan Saheb gave his lecture on this event itself. He said, "Friends! The host sister is deeply unhappy, as the costly mattress has been badly spoiled. I am also equally unhappy. But why we should be unhappy? The blot is, in fact, less than one-hundredth part of the whole

mattress, and more than 99 part is as beautiful as it was. Why should we see this stain only and not the remaining part of the mattress, which is so attractive? In our life also, we suffer from such attitude. Even with one event we feel that whole of our life has gone in vain but we do not see towards so many years that have gone and which are yet to come an event is only a little spot and the remaining part of life can be made much better. We can do it; it is in our hand. We must have long hopes and need not cry over a small incident. We cannot waste away the whole of remaining life simply for the reason of a small incident".

This incident gives inspiration to all of us, and we must remember it whenever we are in trouble or face unexpected painful circumstances.

Pandit Lalan always appreciated virtues. He himself honored and accepted good things and virtues from all sides. He praised virtuous people. He never spoke ill of anyone. He was freely meeting with all types of persons even though they may not be spiritually affected. He respected everyone whom directly or indirectly contributed for his own development. He approved and encouraged good deeds even if the same were outside the scope of Jainism.

He was totally free from greed, attachment and pride. His simplicity was his best ornament. He was an ideal teacher from the very beginning. The study of Jain scriptures and company of great persons exemplified this. He never valued money very much. He was felicitated on April '48 by the Kutchchi Jain Samaj at Mahavir Jain Vidyalaya, Mumbai and on June, '48 by the Mumbai Jain Yuvak Sangh and huge amounts were given to him in bags. He did not keep anything from these amounts but accepted only that much amount which the conveners had decided for maintenance of his family.

Lalan Saheb used to meet great Acharyas of Jainism, which included KesarVijayaji, VinayVijayaji, VijayVallabhSoori and others. He also went freely everywhere where he can gain some knowledge. He met Shrimad Rajchandra, Kanji Swamy, LaghuRaj Swamy, Mahatma Gandhi, Virchand Gandhi, Pandit Sukhlalji, Shri Kedarnathji, Shri JinVijayaji, Shri Motichand Girdharlal Kapadia, Saint Vinoba, Kaka Kalelkar, Shri Malavijayaji.

In Jain traditions, the study of Yoga and other systems of meditations are not much accepted. Pandit Lalan, however, said that there was unlimited power hidden in every soul and it could be brought out to action by knowledge and meditation. Here he stressed upon the rite of Samayik. He himself practiced these rites very sincerely. Many prominent persons of Jain community were deeply impressed by the experiments he made with others during the days of Paryushan in Hoobli. He, further, made many experiments of Samayik in Kutchh, Saurashtra, Mumbai and Ahmedabad and thousands of people took part in them. He loved study of Yoga and scriptures.

Pandit Lalan had created literature of several types for the guidance of little-learned people in very simple language. He wanted to acquaint the people of India and other countries with Indian culture, philosophy, meditation and Yoga. His 24 books in Gujarati and two in English have been duly published. The notable of them is as under:

- Sahaj Samadhi: It is shown in this book as to how by adopting Yoga system one can attain self-knowledge after being free from outward attitude, knowing the importance of one's soul and proceeding to see one-self very deeply step by step. The book was written in 1901 AD and its English translation was done by Herbert Warren in 1914.

- Divya Jyoti Darshan: This book was first published in 1908 AD and almost the same subjects as in Sahaj Samadhi (see above) are discussed in it.
- Translation of Swanubhav Darpan.
- Shraman Narad (Translation)
- Gospel of Man (Manav Geeta-1900 AD)
- Experiments in Samayik (1926): This is a useful book for meditation. Here, Lalan Saheb has described eight types of Samayiks with illustration on each. The description is effective and enlightening. More than six editions of this book have been published upto now.
- Atma vabodh: This is criticism and discussion on the book of 43 stanzas written by Shri JayShekhar Soori.
- Jain Dharm-Prarambh Pothi-in 3 parts: Pandit believed that hands are the symbol of bravery, head that of knowledge, heart that of pleasure and speech that of knowledge in the form of Oom. If all these four aspects are properly developed and utilized. Life becomes fulfilled and man can achieve the highest position.

Conclusion:

The personality of Pandit Lalan gives us inspiration for a determined life. From his highly developed life we learn virtues of simplicity, satisfaction, urge for knowledge, service to society, love for Indian culture, need to train and develop children very well, desire to understand and accept new thinking, selflessness and love for the world. Let us follow his path and start efforts to gain the light of knowledge, ideal behavior and meditation for enlightenment of our soul.