

## **32. An Idol of Service to Humanity: Shri Hrushabhdas Ranka**

### **Introduction:**

Not only the Jains living in India but those residing abroad were also very much attached to Shri Hrushabhdas Ranka, an idol of sympathy and service to mankind. He was a man who had no rival and was known to be friend of one and all. He has relinquished his own self and had become a person of the whole Jain community. He dedicated his life for others. He was, thus, the most popular person among the Jains.

### **Birth, Childhood and Business:**

Shri Ranka was born at Fatepur village of Khandesh District in Maharashtra on December 3, 1903. His ancestors were native of Jodhpur State of Rajasthan. The name of his grandfather was Dhanrajji and Shri Pratapmal was his father. They were in all five brothers and sisters: three sisters and two brothers. Shri Hrushabhdasji was the elder brother. Regarding his surname Ranka, it is said that his ancestors were in the trade-business of cloth prepared from the hair of Ranku quality of goats that happened in Punjab. As such they were known as Ranka.

His formal education was only up to standard eight because he was helping his father in the business he was only 14 years old. After working with his father for some years, he joined as a partner in the company named Vachchraj Kheti limited, which was engaged in agriculture and taming of cows. He retired from here after a few years and entered the business of insurance. This was his main field of earning almost for the whole of his life. He worked in this business for many decades and finally retired in 1971.

### **National Fervor:**

The Swadeshi movement influenced him. (Use only Indian made cloth and articles) launched by Mahatma Gandhi and Gokhle and look up the work of propagating the use of and distributing Khadi (hand-woven cotton cloth) at his young age of only 20. He was being more and more influenced by the national movement and national issues. He suffered imprisonment of about four and a half months for participating in Salt Satyagrah in 1931. He again suffered this much imprisonment at Dhulia and Visapur for national reasons. He had to spend 13 months in jail at Nagpur for participating in Quit India movement. This great person, thus, proved his patriotism in his young age.

### **In the Company of Great Men:**

Shri Hrushabhdas had the good fortune to be in the company of great men of national level before and after independence. In the beginning he worked at Wardha, Jalgaon, Poona and Surrounding regions. Here he came into contact with Vinoba Bhave, Mahatma Gandhi, Kedarnathji, Jamnalalji Bajaj, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Prof. Jaju. Hrushabhdasji cultivated his attitude to catch up virtues of others and hence he was quite simple, absolutely honest, personal disciple, holy thinking, non-violence, selflessness and common good of the people. He worked in creative activities and national movements for more than three decades by holding key positions and yet he never cared for honor or money. Even after independence, he did not want to become a minister or a governor but continued to work for the society and relief works. Later he dedicated himself to the service of Jain community.

Hrushabhdasji wanted to cease to be an individual and be absorbed for the society and hence he took minimum interest in his home-affairs. His wife Shrimati Rajkumari was a holy, serviceable and husband-devoted pious woman. She was always with Shri Rankaji. They had three daughters-Varsha, Vimla and Shashi and one son Rajendra. As they're one and the only one son Rajendra expired in a small illness, Rajkumariji was extremely unhappy. Her mind was permanently affected.

Rankaji had maintaining surprising peace and patience even in such painful circumstances and had converted his time into the hours of worship and prayer to God. This reveals his matured understanding of human life.

### **In the Wide Field of Service:**

Hrushabhdasji had permanent impressions for service, sympathy and piety from his childhood. He could not see pains of others without having tears in his own eyes. He stayed with Jamnalal Bajaj and Vinoba Bhave at Wardha occasionally. He was, therefore, more deeply attached for service of the people. In the years before independence he decided to follow the principles of Gandhiji very rigidly because he believed that the country couldn't have economic independence without first achieving political independence. His services first appeared in the propagation of Khadi, service to cows and up-lift of Harijans-down trodden people. Later, he gave his services in the works connected with Kasturba Memorial and Gandhi Memorial.

His services in the various relief works were not only praise worthy but also unparalleled. Rankaji with his companions would always rush for any relief work for draught affected people, earthquake victims or flood victims. He was a leader for relief works for draught affected people in Bihar and Maharashtra, flood victims of Gujarat or severe draught in Rajasthan. At the time of draught in Bihar, he started Mahavir Kalyan Kendra-Mahavir Relief Centre at Mumbai respecting the appeal of Shri Jayprakash Narayan. Distributing them food grains helped lacs of persons, clothes and residences by this Centre and people from other regions also came out to help and co-operate in this task in large number. Rankaji earned praises from all sides for his services and this Centre also became famous as a foremost relief-institution.

Bharat Jain MahaMandal is a prominent institute of Jains and Rankaji began to take interest in the working of this institute since 1946. He deeply longed for the unity of Jains. He took up editing of Jain Jagat periodical in 1948. Shri Chiranjilal Barjatya was working here before Rankaji took his entry. Rankaji worked here with so much real, efficiency and integrity that his services were appreciated. He was taken up as General Secretary of this institution very shortly. He was elected as president of 1949 conference of his institution at Chennai. He began to register new members-general and life-long for this institution with the co-operation of social workers. He sent very good articles for Jain Jagat periodical also, and thus, the periodical became popular as a foremost, authentic, matured, secular and social mouthpiece of Jain community in a few years. Its outward as well as internal form was attractive. With his continued perseverance, patience and hard work of 15-17 years he earned love of intelligent and wealthy people of Mumbai. He stayed at there on permanent basis from 1958 so that he could do this work conveniently. In these days there was 2500<sup>th</sup> celebration year of Lord Mahavir's great departure for heaven and with the constant efforts for unity among Jains, these celebrations were made untidily upto 1971-72. There were committees of Jains at District levels; state levels as also at national level. A great book named Samansuttam prepared under the guidance of Vinoba Bhave was presented before Indians and the whole world. This accredited book was all acknowledged books in Jain community and it was brought out to make these celebrations more joyful. This was a great historical work. The credit for most outstands fieldwork to bring out unity among Jains on this great occlusion goes to Rankaji because he was the secretary of the celebrations-committee at Mumbai. Rankaji will be remembered for centuries to come for this great accomplishment.

Shri Shantiprasad Sahoo and Sheth Shri Kasturbhai Lalbhai lent their co-operation with open heart and the salvation-ceremony of Lord Mahavir at Mumbai and Delhi became extremely popular. The Government of India also approved such celebrations at other places in India and in several foreign countries. The celebrations were, therefore, made a grand scale. The central and state Governments extended their help and co-operation in these celebrations. So much literature on Jainism was

brought out, several educational activities were started, service centers were opened, holy places and Jain temples were renovated, new temples were built, new coins were brought out, artful photographer, albums and things of art were also published and put up for the public. The celebrations were completed on grand scale in India and many foreign countries. The publication of high quality Jain literature and propagation of the principles of Jainism in foreign countries were the main achievements of these celebrations.

To provide facilities for study to the outstanding Jain students, and help the poor women of Jain community Jain students, several arrangements were made for this purpose. The institute named "Jain Gruh Udyog" Jain cottage industry contributed very much for the development of poor class, especially women, of Jain community. Rankaji was very much interested for the uplift of youth and students. He had deep faith in the power of youth. He published a book titled "Dhan Kamavani Kala" ways to earn money-and thereby guided the youth of Jain community to be self-supporting. He started Jain Vidya Pracharak Mandal for expansion of education at chinchvad near Pune and other similar institutions at Chandvad near Ahmednagar and other places to help the Jain students to prosecute their study. He arranged for scholarships to the outstanding students and opened helping centers to guide them.

He gave his special and timely services in Anuvrat movement. (A religious movement). Acharya Tulsi arrived at Ahmedabad in 1967 to pass his monsoon and Shri Rankaji was requested to take the leadership of this movement. Shri Rankaji said that if Shri Ravishankar Dada accepted to be the President, he would be ready to work as vice-president of this movement. At last, Ravishankar Dada accepted his request and then Shri Rankaji worked as Vice President of this movement for four years from 1968 to 1971. He made this movement prevailing all over India. Alongwith thus, he started a fortnightly periodical titled AnuVrata and it became very much popular. It was considered to be an authentic and most creditable. It was welcomed all over Jain community. This is an outstanding evidence of his working with alround efficiency honesty and hard labor day and night.

### **Last Journey:**

Shri Rankaji served the nation, society and Jainism for more then five decades. He passed away peacefully on December 10, 1977 at Pune. He has left his lofty ideals for the youth of the present age and we are all grateful to this person for many years to come.