

20. Jain Dharm Bhushan Shree Sheetalprasadji

Introduction:

Even when the revolution of 1857 AD for independence was a failure, the thinkers and patriots of the country did not leave away hope for getting independence tomorrow if not today. The Indian National Congress was established in 1885 AD and the people of India raised their voice for freedom with increased vigor. In spite of this, the people were very backward. There were child-marriages, dinners after death, dowry, and denial for widow-marriages, illiteracy, blind faith and many other evils. In those days the social, economical and spiritual darkness. Maharaj Shri Sheetalprasadji was born.

Birth, Education and Training:

Sheetal was born in 1879 AD at Lucknow, the capital of United Province. Lala Makhkhanalji and his wife Narayanidevi were his parents. Not much of information about his childhood is available. He had completed his primary and secondary education and passed the matriculation examination in first grade at the age of 18. He also passed the examination of Accountantship from the Roorkee Engineering College after four years and soon joined the government service.

Even though Sheetal made a good progress in education, he was to be a man of quite different trend. He was not from an ordinary clay. He achieved virtues through his daily life and kept himself engaged in good thinking. This is evident from his writing appeared in Hindi Jain Gazette of May 24th 1896. He writes: O learned Jain brothers! You are the real pillars of Jainism. Preserve it, expand it, awaken it as it is in dormant condition, adopt holy and benevolent behavior by mind, body and speech. You will, thereby, improve your present life as well as lives to come.

Family Life and Fire Test:

He was married to a daughter of Shri Chhedilalji, a resident of Calcutta. The girl was virtuous, always in service of her husband, beautiful but her life was very short. She died on February 13, 1904 because of plague. Alongwith this, celibate Sheetal had to suffer other strokes of the death of his mother and younger brother within a month. These events increased his detachment from worldly affairs, while on the other hand several parents of high standing in society, with so much of wealth came up with the proposal of Sheetal's second marriage with their beautiful daughters. There were all sorts of temptations before this young Sheetal of 25 years of age but he faced them all with astonishing courage. He resigned from the Government service on August 19th 1905 and decided to pass his life for the service of the society and high reading.

Company of Saints and Restrained Life:

In 1905 AD, he went to serve at the conference of Digambar Jain Mahasabha. He came in contact with famous charitable man Shri Manikchandra of Mumbai in the conference. Sheetal was devoted to real service to society, he was quite young, very well educated, efficient, industrious and yet very simple. He had heart-felt love for Jainism, he was detached with worldly affairs and was deeply invested with all virtues. Shri Manikchandra drew up the boy with him, took him to Mumbai and made all arrangements for his convenient stay. Sheetal worked under Sheth Shri Manikchandra for four years and gave his services to several institutions. All and everyone loved him. He had learnt virtues of studying religion and scriptures, he was free from ill habits of smoking, drinking, gambling etc. He never ate meat. He used to drink only filtered water, he studied regularly, and he was thoughtful and tolerant. He had all these virtues from his grand father Lala Mangalsenji. He took vow of life-long celibacy in 1911 AD under the consent of Elak Shri Pannalalji Maharaj at Sholapur and adopted hand-woven clothes of saffron color. He was wearing only Dhoti and keeping shawl on shoulders. By and by he restricted his diet, started to do prayers and religious rites at fixed timings. He started studying

scriptures. He decided not to eat anything while being in any vehicle on travelling. He used to observe total fast on holy days. He adopted several other restrictions to pass clean and holy life of a detached person. He followed all these limitations till the end of his life with absolute integrity.

Service to Holy Places and Propaganda of Religion:

The celibate went through the whole of India for expanding Jainism. He went to Brahmdesh (now Myanmar) and Shri Lanka to study Buddhism. He desired to go abroad in Western countries but circumstances did not help. He was liberal, tolerant and invested with the feelings of good for everyone in the world. As such he became popular wherever he went. He maintained detailed note of his movement from place to place and such notes for his movements in and around Mumbai, Madras, Karnatak, etc. have been published in the form of books, he advised people to renovate the old places of pilgrimage.

Service to Literature:

This can be divided into two parts: (1) Editing of Jain periodicals and (2) Comments and translation of Jain scriptures and independent writing of books.

- He worked as an editor of Jain Mitra periodical for 20 years from 1909 to 1929 AD. He sent many books for prominent persons as presents with a view to expand Jainism. He also handled publication of Jain Gazette, Veer and Sanatan Jain periodicals for many years. He continued to write even though he remained on tour for expanding Jainism and therefore the publication of periodicals went on regularly without interruption. He encouraged young writers to write and provided necessary guidance.
- There are 77 books written and edited by him. These can be classified as under:

Spiritual	26
Jainism and Religion	18
Morality	7
Historical	6
Literature of Taran Swamy	9
Biographies	5
Others	6

His wide knowledge, experience, literary skill, efforts and sincerity towards work undertaken were apparent from his works. He showed how good behavior and spiritual practices could be carried on even in daily routine activities in very simple language. He translated with critical notes many books like Pravachansar, Samaysar, Niyamsar, Parmatma Prakash, Samadhi Shatak, Ishtopadesh, Tattva Bhavna, Tattvasar, Swayambhoo Stotra etc. He prepared a great book Sahaj Sukh Sadhan by staying in contact with Shri LaghuRaj Swami who was an ardent devotee of Shrimad Rajchandra. This book is very much useful to all devotees of Jainism. Its Gujarati translation has also been published. He expressed deep respects to both these saints in the introduction of this great book. He can be considered to be one of the great personalities who have translated difficult spiritual books into simple Hindi so that little learned common people may read and understand them. He was deeply attached to spiritual practices and so traditional Pandits learned persons at times laughed him out saying him a pure spiritualists. But the celibate was absolutely sincere in spiritual practices and service to the people and he was least affected by such comments about him.

Service to Society and Convocation:

He had decided to be in the service of the society from his childhood. He always completed the work taken in hand by own efforts. He called on others and involved in these tasks in such a way that evens the difficult was done easily. He expanded education, eradicated evil practices, wiped out differences and conflicts, established unity and co-operation, helped the poor through various institutions, attended annual functions and other meetings and guided the old and new generations for the good of all. He was loved and welcomed everywhere. The following are the main institutions established by him: -

- Syadvad Vidyalaya, Benaras - a religious school
- Shri Hrushabh Brahmcharyashram, Hastinapur - a boarding house for mendicants.
- Jain Shravkika Shram, Bombay - a boarding house for nuns.
- Jain Bala Ashram, Aara - a boarding house for girls.
- Shri Jain Vyaparik Vidyalaya, Delhi - a commercial school.

All these and many of his services to the society were appreciated and he was awarded the title of Jain Dharm Bhushan on February 28, 1913 at the Conference held at Benaras under the Presidentship of Dr. Harman Jakobi. This was a very great honor to him. The great Guru-teacher Shri Gopaldasji Baraiya had also given him great honor in this big conference. Maharaj Shri, however, did not disclose any of these honors in his periodicals. What a surprising detachment towards worldly honors!

In spite of all these praise-worthy works of Maharaj Shree, he had many rivals and they did not spare him from various types of harassment. These rivals were displeased of his reformatory practices and attitude, which were supported by the Jain scriptures and saints also. These rivals had, however, repented for their misdeeds of troubling such a saint as Maharaj Shri.

Last Days:

At the age of 62 he had the disease of trembling. He was taken to Mumbai, Delhi, Rohtak and other places for treatment but there was no recovery. This trouble developed into paralysis and expanded to various parts of his body. He was, then, unable to move out. Babu Ajitprasad Vakil took over responsibility for his service and shifted him to his AjitaShram at Lucknow. With the increasing trouble of the disease, he, one day, fell down on January 6th '42 and there was fracture in the bone below his waist. His health worsened day by day thereafter and at last he breathed his last at 4-00 hours morning on February 16th 1942. A great personality left the mortal body and went on for eternal peace.

Conclusion:

Shri Sheetalprasadji had adopted celibacy from his very young age and dedicated himself for the service of the people and religion. He tried hard for the development of women, children and young men. He exhausted his whole life for Jain periodicals, Jain art, Jain literature, Jain scriptures and Jain education. He served the society for more than four decades forgetting his own interests. It was difficult to find such a dedicated saint in those days but the people of the day did not know him in time and caused loss to themselves. They lost the opportunity of creating strong and united Jain Samaj with the guidance of this Samant Bhadra of the present age. The learned and the rich could not recognize his ability because of idleness, internal conflicts and lack of foresightedness. As a result, all round development of Jainism and Jain community in independent India of 20th century could not be achieved as it could have been expected. This is a painful fact. In the celebration of his centenary, one conference was arranged at Indore in the company and under the guidance of Elacharya Shri

Vidyanandji. Let us hope that something concrete will be done at least by now to recognize and honor the services of this great celibate Maharaj Shri Jain Dharm Bhushan Sheetalprasadji so that the Jain community be free to a little extent from the debt it owes to Maharaj Shri Sheetalprasadji.