

### 33. Mooni Shri Santbalji

#### Introduction:

The ruling section of India has always been respecting saints and sadhus. The rulers ruled on the basis of truth, non-violence and justice. The saints on the other hand gave voice of the poor, illiterate, and tribal people living pitiable life. They guide and preach them for their well being. The saints should be helpful to such people in improving their plight. This was the belief of Mahatma Gandhi and the famous Jain mendicant of Gujarat Mooni Shri Santbalji was an exclusive person of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to follow this principle in his life.

#### Birth and Childhood:

Mooni Shri Santbalji was born in 1904 at village Tol of Morbi Taluka where Shrimad Rajchandra and Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati were also born. He was a prestigious family with good culture. The village Tol is about four miles away from Tankara. His childhood name was Shivilal and Shri Nagjibhai and Shrimati Motiben were his parents. He had received the culture of service to others, devotion and honesty from his parents as also from his maternal relatives. His father died when he was only of five years of age and hence he studied up to standard seven at the maternal house of his mother where the homely atmosphere was of devotion to God and prayers. He went to Mumbai to earn money so as to help his mother when he was only thirteen years of age. He took employment at the monthly salary of Rs. 35/- in a firm named F.K. Modi and Sons. He won the heart of his Parsi employer by his honest, sincere, skillful and punctual services. But then he began to work in another firm for the monthly salary of Rs. 150/- for the reason of one of his Muslim friends. The new employer had total trust in Shivilal and decided to make him a partner in the firm. But the mind of Shivilal was longing for the company of saints.

In these days, the Jain mendicant Shri Nanchandraji who had adopted the thinking of Mahatma Gandhi happened to be at Mumbai. His lectures were directed to consolidate the thinking of Lord Mahavir and Mahatma Gandhi in doing religious activities. Hearing these lectures, Shivilal was moved to adopt Dixa. He thought to adopt Dixa after the death of his mother with the consent of his sister and other relatives. There was prohibitive act on granting of Dixa by Jain mendicants but the king of Morbi was present to hear the preachings of Shri Nanchandraji and being deeply affected by the words of Shri Nanchandraji, he lifted this ban and then Shivilal was granted Dixa in 1929 in the presence of thousands of Jains and non-Jains. Shivilal was now Mooni Shri Saubhagya Chandra. He became an ardent disciple of Shri Nanchandraji Maharaj. He later became famous as Santbal.

#### Study of Scriptures:

Within five years of his Dixa he studied languages Sanskrit, Prakrit, English, Hindi etc and scriptures on Nyaya, Praman, Tark and literature. He studied several scriptures of Jainism as also important religious of the world. He studied so deeply and yet quickly that several learned persons as also his teacher mendicant Nanchandraji were surprised. He also became ShataVadhani (one who remembers one hundred verses at a time). The learned persons of India at Ajmer conference gave him title of Bharat Ratna.

Because of his ability to remember many things at a time, he studied and thought on serious issues of Jain scriptures and gave vast literature to Gujarati Samaj within the years 1933 to 1938. He converted the four scriptures-Uttaradhyayan, Dashvaishalik, Acharang and Avashyak into simple and effective Gujarati language and published them through the Mahavir Prakashan Mandir-a publication house. He presented the first two scriptures in the form of poetry under the title Sadhak Sahachari. In his last years, he translated Tattvarth Sootra in Gujarati poetic form and tried to place the original

scripture in the hands of Gujarati Samaj. He, thus, followed a welcome practice. In this achievement he proved himself to be a highly learned personality as also his skill of composing poetry.

### **Loneliness and Separation from Religious Trend:**

Having done all these works, he was not at peace. He wanted to keep himself in loneliness. He went to the bank of river Narmada and observed absolute silence with total loneliness for about one year. He remained as if he was a piece of wood. After this, he published a statement on being inspired by the light or inherent power that he received from this penance. He expressed revolutionary ideas to create society on the basis of principles of religion. As a result, the Sangh, which had granted him Dixa, disapproved him as a mendicant and boycotted him. But Mooni Shri Santbalji was one of those Sadhus of the whole of India who wanted to change those parts of religion which were not useful to society and which were detrimental to the interests of the society, simultaneously preserving the good parts of the religion based on truth and also preserving the composite unity of Indian culture. Even though the Sangh boycotted him, he maintained peace and patience. He continued to live life on the original principles of Jainism coupled with the thoughts and behavior of his own sect of Sadhu life. He continued to move from place to place, beg for alms and unexpectedness as a Jain mendicant and yet stopping forward to his determined goal of life.

### **Experiments in Social Service:**

His discovery of life was not to practice religion by moving away from society. He promulgated good of society with that of individual and good of self with that of the other. He was fully determined to be with the people and he moved in totally backward villages of Bhal-Nalkantha region of Gujarat where even drinking water is scarcely available and put in new thinking, new light and new courage in the ignorant people of this unproductive region. He worked with motherly love among the poor, ignorant, illiterate, rejected, neglected and helpless people. They were suffering from the cruelty of moneylenders, land brokers, coolie practices, blind faith and evil practices of the society. He made it meaningful the line of a poem: Let me be mother of the whole world and shower love over every one. He created centers for constructive work. He consolidated the villages, low caste persons and women together and drew them for self-honor and pride.

He started co-operative and drew them for self-honor and pride learning, encouraged Khadi and cottage industries, adopted improved agriculturing, led them to maintain cows, activated village panchayats, started the system of arbitration for village quarrels, pressed for Lok Adalats for dealing with some more serious disputes, committees to absolve discarded persons, mother-communities, clinics, experimental unions, farmers unions, cowherd's unions, self-labor, village industries, laborers union and several other institutions. Mooni Shri Santbalji inspired and encouraged people to keep themselves together and work with co-operation.

Villages were dependent upon others and Mooni Shri Santbalji gave them the programme for earning bread, housing, clothing, education, health, justice and security so that they might be self-supporting.

He made all possible efforts to secure democratic administrative system, non-violent and religious minded society, clean and honest dealing and hard-working attitude in the people. He created hopes and faith in these people by his own virtues, restraint and the power of penance. He took the people to stand up with faith that they could do something for others. He told them that they had to swim by their own boat. He brought them out from the beliefs of destiny. He continued to inspire these people continuously for 45 years and ordinary people did extra-ordinary works under the guidance and inspiration of Mooni Shri Santbalji. He poured new light in villages and the meek villagers came out with the force of their own. Mooni Shri did not confine himself within the limitations of practical behavior in society, he did not consider immediate profit or loss like a trader but thought with long

terms good of the people. He was for the change of prevailing circumstances, change of cornerised thinking and also the change of heart and he fought to achieve this till the end of his life.

His vow of not to beg for anything, his life and his prestige were all at stake and yet he spent the whole of his life to preserve the social values. There was not a single corner of the society in which his ideals and his thoughts had not touched. He wanted to build the society on the basis of single religion of equality, sympathy and honor for all. He made new in-roads in economic, social, educational, cultural, political, spiritual, moral and religious fields. He opposed injustice by non-violent methods and made all out efforts to establish truth and justice. He made penance a way for social good. Individual activities of Jainism were converted into social activities. He, thus, gave an entirely new outlook for the good of self as well as of society. He used to say that all the Sadhus or mendicants should discard discriminating caste, creed, community, region and religion and work for world-peace.

After moving all over the country, Mooni Shri Santbalji came to Chinchin village of Thana District in Maharashtra as per his last wishes. He wanted to create International Centre named Mahavirnagar here and hence he stayed here on permanent basis until he breathed his last on Friday, on march 26, 1982. He was honored by every home in Maharashtra but he died on the auspicious day of Gudi Padvo.

Following the traditions of some saints of middle-age culture, Mooni Shri became younger brother Santbal of other saints, and told the stories of Ramayan, Mahabharat, Bhagwat, Geeta and the preachings of Lord Mahavir to the common people making it to suit to the prevailing circumstances in the society. He inspired and encouraged everyone to start working for the good of the society. He was an activist from his birth and even though he accepted renunciation on one side turned to look for others following the ideal thinking of Mahatma Gandhi. He said: Service to society is service to God and advised everyone not to forget this principle ever in his or her life. We shall also follow his words and pay him highest tribute only with our works.