

28.Pandit-Varya Shri Bechardas Doshi

(PanditVarya means a learned personality of the first rank)

PanditVarya Shri Bechardasji can be considered to be one of the most outstanding learned persons. He was a patriot and a social worker. He lived a very difficult life and he never hoped for garlands of flowers. He made hard sacrifices for advanced studies and advertisement the punishment of exile for the motherland. He served the society and the country with mind, body and money all his life. He fulfilled his life by making efforts in all walks of life. He awakened the Jain community from blind faith. He is one of the very few learned personalities of this age. He lived among various types of difficulties from the very beginning of his life and maintained patience and peace of mind upto his advanced age even against heart-rending troubles. He spared no efforts for knowing new things and search for truth. This was the exceptional virtue of Shri Bechardasji Doshi.

Birth andDisturbed Childhood:

The small town Vallabhipur occupies an important place in India and in the history of Jainism. This place takes the credit for the compilation of Jain scripture and commentaries more than 1500 years ago. Pandit Bechardasji was born on the in 1890 in this well-known town of Gujarat (old Saurashtra). Shri Jivraj Ladhabhai Doshi was his father and Shrimati Otambai was his mother. The family belonged to Visa Shrimati Deravasi Jain-a sect of Jainism. The economic condition of the family was normal. Panditji started his study in the village school of Vallabhipur but studied in his maternal native village of Sanosara upto 5 standard. He completed his sixth standard at Vallabhipur. His father expired when Panditji was only ten years of old. The family faced hard circumstances to survive. His mother had to sell out all her ornaments to do the death rites of Shri Jivrajbhai. Panditji's eyes had tears when he told the tale of those days. His mother Otambai had to grind corn and do manual work as a servant. It was even than hard to maintain the family of two sons and one daughter. Panditji never took it as shame in doing odd jobs in others' houses to help the mother in maintaining the family. Panditji prepared ashes to mix with corn, took out cotton from cotton balls, took out cottonseeds from cotton, sold dried pulse and other eating things in public.

Preliminary Study of Scriptures:

He wanted to study further but he was seriously pressed with the problem of maintaining the family. In those days, the learned Jain Acharya Shri Vijay Dharm Suriiji Maharaj had set up a Pathshala (School for religious study) at Mandal to create learned persons in Jainism and Shri Harshchandraj Bhurabhai (late Mooni Shri JayantVijayaji) of Vallabhipur town was going to join the Pathshala in 1902-03 (Hindu 1958-59), Pandit Bechardasji Doshi also joined with him. Shri Vijaya Dharm Soorishwarji had deep desire to bring out scholars in Jainism. He was much pleased to such an intelligent boy like Bechar. After this, Shri Vijay Dharm Soorishwarji found it difficult to prepare learned persons in Gujarat, which is a region where financial earning counts very much. He decided to go to Kashi, which was famous for learning in all subjects. Bechardasbhai studied Kaumudi during his stay at Mandal for 5-7 months and then started to go to Kashi with Shri Vijay Dharm Soorijishwarji Maharaj on foot. His mother was not willing to send him at such a distant place and so he returned to Vallabhipur from Godhra with Shri Harshchandrabhai and completed his study upto 7th standard.

Bechar returned to Vallabhipur respecting the wishes of his mother but he always longed for higher studies and so he went to Palitana and studied Jainism (NavaTattva etc.). with Mooni Shri Siddhvijayaji. He faced much difficulty in boarding and lodging at Palitana. His mother had given him a tiffin box. He consumed this food and then he maintained himself on alms from the people. He had to pass several days without food. At last one generous soul Shri Saubhagyachand Kapurchand of Jamnagar decided to give him rupees ten per month. Now Bechar was a little happy. He came back

to Vallabhipur nearly after one year at Palitana. Somebody told him that the persons bearing their names beginning with the letter B had the changes of being on long journey. Hearing this, Bechar once again asked his mother to allow him to go to Kashi but the mother once more returned. At last, he went to the Pathshala at Mahesana and completed the study of the book Margopadeshika of Bhandarkar within one month.

Higher Studies toKashi:

Bechar was not satisfied with his studies. One day he took to Kashi with Harshchandrabhai in 1906 without informing his mother. Thus, Acharya Maharaj desired to prepare scholars in Jainism, met Becharbhai's wish to study further in Jainism under any circumstances. But Bechar was caught by smallpox within six months. As soon as, his mother knew this, she went to Benaras all by herself. A mother's love can not be judged by intelligence. Bechar returned to Vallabhipur after passing two years at Kashi. By now he had already studied three-fourth of LaghuVritti written by the great Acharya Hemchandra. Bechar came back to Kashi after a short stay at Vallabhipur and started editing books of Shri YashoVijaya Jain Granthmala in co-operation with Pandit Hargovinddas Trikamdas Sheth meanwhile his study of Jain scriptures continued. The books published by this Granthmala on Jain Vyakaran and Jain Nyaya were accepted as text books for the examination of "Tirth" in Calcutta Sanskrit College and then Becharbhai passed the Tirth examination in Nyaya and Vyakaran (i.e. Philosophical logic and grammar). Becharbhai and Hargovinddas also passed the examination on Religion held by Mumbai Education Board with a top rank. Both of them were given prizes of rupees 75 each.

Thus, Pandit Becharbhai was now being considered as an intelligent and clever student. In those days he was composing poems in Sanskrit also and could complete in complete stanzas on the spot. Seeing these merits, Maharaj Shree offered him scholarship of rupees ten per month but Becharbhai declined to accept it saying that when the Pathshala met with all his requirements, how could he accept such scholarship.

Prakrit Language and Study of Scriptures:

Pandit Becharbhai had by now good acquaintances with many scholars who were coming to see Shri Maharaj Shree. Maharaj Shree desired to make Becharbhai a perfect master in Shraman Sanskrit-culture and Becharbhai had already studied the Prakrit language by this time. Becharbhai said that he learnt Prakrit and Ardhamagadhi languages by his own intuition and that these languages entered his mind naturally and easily. But this was not enough. It was necessary to study Pali language also. For this purpose, Maharaj Shree sent Becharbhai and Pandit Hargovinddas to Srilanka with Dr. Satishchandra Vidyabhushan. Both of them returned to India after finishing their work within a short period of eight months. They started publishing Old Jain Books in the series already started before.

Nationalism: With Mahatma Gandhi andPandit Sukhlalji:

There was on air of nationalism upto now in religious, social and non-secular education institutes. Becharbhai witnessed some of the movement of Bang Bhang when he was at Kashi. After this he decided to wear hand-woven cloth and used sugar prepared in villages. In 1915-16 AD Mahatma Gandhi gave a call declared to use only Indian goods and Khadi (hand-woven cotton cloth). Becharbhai was so much attached to Jainism that he hardly read any book other than Jain scriptures. With his study of Prakrit, Ardhamagadhi and Pali Languages, his thinking limits broadened. He taught Jain literature independently. He was eager to know more and more facts and bare truth underneath. His blind faith began to weaken. He was then interested to memorize several scriptures and many a times he was reciting and repeating writings and stanzas of Jain scriptures. This time in the life of

Pandit Becharbhai was of revolt. He turned to scrutinize the statements of the scriptures and think deeply.

Translation and Publication of Scriptures:

Pandit Becharbhai now thought that if there was to be awakening of the Jain culture, the Jain books, which were originally in Sanskrit, should be translated so that a common man would read them. It was not possible to do this work in Benaras and hence he joined Jinagam Prakashan Sabha established by Sheth Poojabhai Hirachand of Ahmedabad in 1914 and came to Ahmedabad. The main aim of these institutions was to prepare and publish authentic translation of important Jain scriptures. But in those days, there was a strong protest against translation of Jain scriptures. The saints, mendicants and liberal intellectuals did not like to submit to such protest. Pandit Becharbhai expressed his views for translation of Jain scriptures in an open public meeting held to celebrate the birthday of Lord Mahavir. There arose even stronger protest against translation of Jain scriptures. At times it was felt that such protest may take the form of physical beating and serious quarreling. But Panditji carried on with his views and did the translation from Mumbai.

During those days, on January 21, 1919 an open lecture was delivered on the subject: Loss caused by mutilation of Jain literature: in the meeting held under the Presidentship of Shri Motichand Girdharlal Kapadia. This open lecture was held under the invitation of the secretary of Vakrutva Pracharak Mandal, which was working under the auspices of Mangrol Jain Sabha at Mumbai. With this programme there was further serious protest all around against the translation of Jain scriptures, but the true thinkers were not much moved. This lecture placed Pandit Bechardasji in the forefront of public debate. The Jain Sangh at Ahmedabad dismissed him from the Sangh. His boycott was declared. Pandit Bechardasji was, however, determined to tell the truth and did not mind to such actions. Panditji used to say that if public praise or public protest did not matter you couldn't tell the truth otherwise.

Contacts with Mahatma Gandhi:

During those days, Pandit Bechardasji came in contact with Mahatma Gandhi, who was pleased to know the views of Pandit Bechardasji. Gandhiji expressed his best wished for him and advised him to go ahead in his work without caring for public opinion. After this, his contacts with Mahatma Gandhi increased. Pandit Bechardasji joined Gujarat Purattva Mandir of Mahatma Gandhi in 1921-22 AD and here he accomplished the most difficult work of editing Sanmati Tark in co-operation with Pandit Sukhlalji Sanghvi. This work was been praised by many and it is considered to be an ideal one in several other similar works. Mahatma Gandhiji was fully satisfied and pleased with this work. Pandit Bechardasji had to suffer permanent weakness of his left eye for doing this work which was in very small letters.

After this there was that historic event of Mahatma Gandhiji's Dandi March. Panditji could not keep him confide himself within four walls them. He also joined this movement. He worked as an editor of hand-written 'NavJivan' and consequently, was imprisoned for nine months at Visapur.

Problem of Livelihood:

Real difficulties for Pandit Bechardasji began when he was released from jail. He was not allowed to enter the areas under British rule and this continued till 1933-36 when Congress came in power of provinces. It was very difficult for him to maintain a family of 6-7 members. He had also to meet with the expenses of studies of his sons and daughters. Panditji suffered these troubles for 4 to 5 years. He was teaching Sthanakvasi Jain mendicants and students in Marwar, Rajasthan and other places and tried to maintain his family with many troubles. He took pains in expanding Jain literature even in those hard days. He never thought severing his relations with Jain literature and turn to other sources

of income. His wife Shrimati Ajwaliben, his sons Praboth and Shirish and daughters Lalita and Lavanyavati were at his help in all circumstances and we must remember them at this stage.

Appointment as Professor, Stability and Fame:

The L.D. Arts College was established in around 1938 and Pandit Bechardas Doshi was appointed as professor of Ardhamagadhi in this college with the efforts of all respected, learned personality Dr. Anandshankar Dhruva. In 1940, Pandit Bechardas delivered lectures on "Evolution of Gujarati Language" in the Thakkar Vasanti Madhvi series of lectures arranged by the Mumbai University and this made him famous for his deep knowledge of languages. Pandit Bechardas served the Jain literature with devotion for more than sixty years of his life and several important books of Jainism published. He was an exceptional scholar in old Gujarati, pure and impure Prakrit and Ardhamagadhi Language. He held a respectable position among the world scholars in these subjects. Simultaneously, he was a great scholar in Sanskrit too. He was particularly loved for his courage to bring to light the several truths and facts hidden in Jain scriptures. He was a great revolutionary in this direction. Dr. Radhakrishnan, the President of India, honored him in 1964 for his deep learning in Sanskrit literature and devotion in religious scriptures. He was granted a Certificate of merit with a Shawl. Many institutions also honored him. He was the first scholar who was awarded seven gold medals, seven silver caskets and about 15 Certificates of Honor from several prestigious institutions.

Last Years:

Even after his retirement from the college, he had given his honorary services to the L.D. Prachya Vidya Mandir for many years. He guided many students for Ph.D. degree. He expired at the age of 93 on October 11, 1982 after a short illness. He is an immortal personality in the field of Jain culture and Jain literature and we badly need such dedicated persons today.

His Services to Literature:

Here is a list of some of his important works in literature:

Published by Gujarat Vidyapeeth-Gujarat Puratattva Mandir and edited with the co-operation of Pandit Sukhlalji Sanghvi:-

- Sanmati Tark-five parts
- Sanmati Tark-Original translation with commentaries
- Celibacy from the Jain point of view.

In Yashovijayaji Jain Granthmala: with Pandit Hargovinddas: Books in Sanskrit and Prakrit edited.

- Ratnakarav Tarika
- Shantinath Mahakavya-an epic
- Neminath Mahakavya-an epic
- Vijaya Prashasti
- Pandav Charitra
- Sheel Doot
- Nirbhaya Bhim Vyog
- Laghu Shad Darshan Samuchehaya

- Anekant Jaya Pataka (first part)
- Syadvad Manjari
- Abhidhan Chintamani Kosh
- Parshvanath Charitra
- Mallinath Charitra
- JagadGuru Kavya
- Shabda Ratnakar Kosh
- Avashyak Nirukti (Prakrit)

Independent works, independent editing and translation

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| Prakrit Margopadeshika | Independent work |
| Bhagvati Sootra-2 parts | Editing and translation |
| Prakrit Vyakaran-Grammar | Editing and translation |
| Mahavir Vani | Editing and translation |
| Hemchandracharya | Independent work |
| Dhamma Pada | Translation |
| Jain Darshan: | Translation of the commentaries of GunRatna on Shat Darshan Samuchehaya. |