

## 21. Pragna Chakshu Pandit Sukhlalji

Pragna Chakshu means the great man whose deep learning is his eye. Pandit Sukhlalji is considered to be an all-round figure of greatness of the present century. Even though he was blind, he was the true practitioner in the literature of truth; he was the greatest thinker of his times and highly learned in scriptures mainly of Jainism. He had dedicated whole of his life to the Indian culture. He is considered to be one of the most outstanding and the learned persons of Sanskrit in India. He was a seer without the power of seeing. It is a great surprise that a man without eyes edited a great book like "Sanmati Tark" in a modern scientific way wherein every line and every note of comment is full of his deep learning. He was very liberal in his views and therefore, his admirers include many more non-Jains than Jains. This is quite natural and pleasant also.

### Birth and Childhood:

Pandit Sukhlalji was born 1881 corresponding to the Kodh (Dhrangadhra) the place of his maternal father or at Limbdi, the place of his grandfather. This was a village of the state Muli of the District Surendranagar in Saurashtra. Panditji was Visa Shrimali Vanik community of Dhakad-Dharkat generation a sort of merchant community. Sanghvi Talshi and his first wife Maniben were his parents. His mother expired when he was only four years old. He passed his childhood in Limbdi under the care of his distant relative Shri Mulji Kaka of Sayla in absence of his mother.

He was obedient, hard working and very much eager to learn. He was much interested in games. He was adventurous. Self-labor was duly expected in the families of merchants of village as they had to carry bunches of grass, bags of food grains, packages of joggers and other goods in shops and store-rooms. They had to turn tiles of their houses. With all this, the child was much attached to games like playing cards, tops, balls etc. He was interested in horse-riding and swimming.

At school, he was always considered to be a student of first rank. He did his homework regularly but alongwith his school study he took interest in seeing and talking with Jain mendicants and nuns. He was afraid of sins from his childhood. He adopted various types of vows with the advice of Jain mendicants and maintained them rigorously. He obtained religious knowledge from Jain teachers. His father expired in 1919 AD.

### Days of Blindness:

Pandit Sukhlalji has noted that he lost his eyesight at the age of 17. It is like this: It was summer of V.S. 1897. I went to Surendranagar to learn business activities after the festival of Holi-which falls in March. I was working in cotton ginning factory alongwith other boys. I was going for latrine at noon one day and I experience loss of eyesight at that time. I saw everything to be white. I felt that it must be due to scorching heat of the noon. One evening my uncle took me to go home with him in a horse cart. When I reached home, one old dame told that this boy would have smallpox. In the next morning, smallpox was actually seen on my body. The disease took long time and it was very acute on eyes. One eye was so much swollen that even the nose was affected and the eyeball came out. I had unbearable pain in both the eyes. Doctors and Vaidyas were surprised to see this. No medicine worked on me. I lost both of my eyes. Even though I was completely recovered from the smallpox, I could not see and I was permanently blind.

He was now dependent upon others. He had nose, ears and tongue but no eyes. Life was now very burdensome. There was no way out. But he maintained courage. He started his study vigorously with a view to come out from the troubles of life.

### Study of Sanskrit at Limbdi:

The new Upashraya (religious school) at Limbdi was not the main place of his shelter. He would take any periodical that was available and read it. He would recite whatever prayers were at his memory. He would hear new things from others and commit it to memory wherever it was possible. His loneliness was, thus, a bit easy. He was keeping himself in company with any mendicant, who was spending his monsoon at Limbdi and committed to memory several prayers, hymns and stanzas on spiritual subjects under his guidance. He came in contact with Deepchandji Maharaj in 1909 and he learnt many Jain chapters from him in which Dravyanuyog and Ganitanuyog of Jainism were described briefly in Gujarati. He committed to memory many hymns like Dash Vaikalik, Uttaradhyayan, SootraKrutang, Bhaktamar Stotra, Kalyan Mandir Stotra etc. The sweetness of Sanskrit language impressed him very much. When he knew that there is vast literature in Sanskrit and many commentaries on Jain Agams are also in Sanskrit, he was eager to study Sanskrit and he committed to memory everything of Sanskrit which he could do with the help of others even though he may or may not have understood it. His younger brother Chhotalal, two other friends, Popatlal and his brother Gulabchand helped him as his readers so that Sukhlalji may commit to memory by hearing them in Sanskrit. His study and company of several saints, mendicants, disciples, followers; ardent Shravakas, nuns, renunciate, etc only were his activities from 1898 to 1903. He was betrothed for marriage when he was young but this was cancelled by the parents of the when Sukhlalji turned blind and thus there was no family life for Sukhlalji.

### **Towards Kashi-Benaras:**

In 1903-04, Sukhlalji came to know that Acharya VijayDharm Sooriji had established YashoVijaya Jain Pathshala- a school for religious studies- at Kashi and when Sukhlalji took admission to that Pathshala, there were six mendicants and 25 Shravak-students. There was very nice accommodation to stay and board. The friends-group of Sukhlalji included Vijayendra Soori, NyayaVijayaji, JayantVijayaji, Pandit Hargovinddas, Pandit Bechardas etc. Sukhlalji was older than other students were and hence he was well respected at the Pathshala. There were famous Pandits like Ambadutta Shastri and Harnarayan Tiwari to teach these students.

For the first two years, Sukhlalji studied and thought very much. After this, he started teaching new students with himself studying further in Jainism. Thus, Sukhlalji completed his study in Grammar, Poetics, Logic, Linguistics, and word-formation during the four years from 1904 to 1908. He specially helped the weak students. He committed to memory everything he could. He, thus, memorized 18,000 stanzas and completed BruhadVritti of Siddhaim Vyakaran from 1960 to 1963. He went to a pilgrimage to Samet Shikharji and Palitana and gained much knowledge in Jainism.

He passed the monsoon of 1909 in the company of Acharya VijayVallabh Soori at Palanpur. From here he went to Abu-Delwada and returned to Kashi. He then decided to appear at the examination of Sampoorana Nyaya Madhyama of the Queen's college in 1910. Since there was no suitable teacher for him, he was examined orally. Many highly learned and expert personalities questioned him extensively and Sukhlalji answered them. Sukhlalji was declared successful in first class and he also came in personal contacts of these learned personalities. This happened to of much use to him in his further life.

He appeared in the first part of the examination for the degree of Acharya in Nyaya and also Madhyama examination at Patna. He completed all the three parts of the examination for the degree of Acharya upto 1913. He studied the most difficult books on Nyaya. He could easily understand the Khandan-Khand-Khadya of Shree Harsh, AdvaitSiddhi of Shri Madhusudan Saraswati and Chitsukhi of Chit Swaroopacharya which considered to be most complicated and difficult books on the subject. After satisfactory progress in study, Sukhlalji left Kashi. He, then, caught Mooni PunyaVijayaji, Pandit Hirachand, Pandit Bhagwandas, Acharya LalitVijayaji, Acharya JinVijayaji, Shriman HansVijayaji

Maharaj and others. He spent monsoons from 1913 to 1916 at Palanpur, Mahesana and Vadodara. He stayed with Mahatma Gandhi at Sabarmati Ashram and gained much experience.

## **Beginning of Literary Activities:**

Panditji had devoted his life to religion and religious literature. He wrote and edited more than 30 books on Nyaya, Karmvad, Jain Siddhanta, Achar, YogDarshan, AdhyatmaVad, Indian Philosophy, History and so on. These books were published and many of them were translated into Hindi and English. The books are respected as authentic and quoted as references. Sukhlalji started his literary activities by translation. First of all he took up KarmGranth and translated them into Hindi. There is no book in Hindi or Gujarati, which can stand to these translations. The books have been indispensable for those who want to study Jain literature. He took translation as not merely translation but included his comments and supporting quotations from other books. There are comparative comments on important issues. The books include several maps and appendices.

In 1920 he started writing the most important and immortal book of his life-Sanmati Tark.

Mahatma Gandhi established Gujarat Vidyapith at Ahmedabad and Shri JinVijayaji was appointed as the head of archaeological department. He then, started calling up learned personalities and Pandit Sukhlalji was one of them. Pandit Sukhlalji joined the Vidyapith in 1922. He edited the commentary of VadMaharnava-a part of his Sanmati Tark with the co-operation of Pandit Bechardasji. This work proved itself to be unparalleled with any other work in the Indian Spiritual Literature. He collected 24 hand written notes for making their reference that were available in writing, in print or otherwise from all corners in support of his discussion on the issue. Pandit Sukhlalji made his name permanent in the world of learned personalities. Even though this immortal work is said to be on Jainism, it includes all the spiritual subjects and every scholar of comparative studies in various scriptures get everything in this one and the same book. Dr. Harman Jakobi and many other foreign scholars have extensively praised this book. This work was carried on continuously and it took nine years to complete it. The work is in five parts and it includes many appendices. The part six covers elaborate preface, translation of the original and substance in Gujarati.

Pandit Sukhlalji was appointed as a professor in Jain scriptures at Benaras University in 1933. Before joining at Benaras, his book partly written during the holidays at Gujarat Vidyapith was completed and it was printed in 1930. This book was Tattvarth Sootra Vivechan. The book is useful not only to an ordinary Jain but also other learned persons. This book is as good as a textbook for the study of Jainism and it has been very much popular.

He worked as Professor of Jain scriptures and Jainism at Benaras University from 1933 to 1944 but alongwith his teaching activities he himself studied more and more. He went on creating new literature also. He edited "Praman Mimansa", the most outstanding work of Acharya Hemchandraji with the co-operation of Pandit Mahendrakumar and Pandit Dalsukhbhai. It was published in 1939 AD. The comments and preface of this book have been translated into English and the same is published in 1961 AD under the name: Advanced studies in Indian Logic and Metaphysics.

After this, he took up editing "Jain Tark Bhasha" of Yashovijayaji. It was published with exhaustive comments and introduction. After this, he took up Gnan Bindu Bharatiya Darshan and published it in 1942 with detailed comments on Gnan Mimansa and also introduction into it. The only book of Charvak Darshan-Charvak philosophy-Tattvopaplavasinh in Gaikwar Series in 1940 and 1949 AD respectively alongwith-detailed comments views references and quotations. Pandit Sukhlalji became very much famous in foreign countries with the publication of these two series.

Pandit Sukhlalji retired in 1944 even though Dr. Radhakrishnan, the chancellor of Benaras University pressed him to continue and stayed with Acharya JinVijayaji at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai. He was, however, not well at Mumbai and came to Ahmedabad. He took up permanent post of Honorary

Professor at B.J. Vidya Bhavan conducted by Gujarat Vidyasabha. He stayed at "Saritkung" bungalow at Ahmedabad for many years. When it was sold away, Pandit Sukhlalji stayed at Anekant Vihar, which belonged to Acharya JinVijayaji. Both these places happened to be as holy as a place of pilgrimage for learned persons, scholars, social workers and others.

Pandit Sukhlalji retired from Benaras University but he continued creating new literature. He was invited to deliver Sayajirao Memorial lectures at covering the three subjects-Soul, World and God in Gujarati. These have been published in 1958 and 1960 in Hindi under the name Bharatiya Tattva Vidya. These lectures have also been translated into English and L.D. Vidya Mandir under the title Indian Philosophy publishes them in 1977. He has delivered lectures on Soul, God and Penance at Gujarat Vidya Sabha and these have been published in Hindi and Gujarati in 1956 under the heading Adhyatma Vicharna. He delivered lectures on Acharya HariBhadra under the invitation of Mumbai university and the same are published in Hindi and Gujarati in 1966 under the title: Samdarshi-Acharya HariBhadra.

In addition to this, Pandit Sukhlalji has written edited and compiled several other big and small books. We can see from this large bulk of books that he was never idle in his life. He has done so much work even though he had lost his eyes. This is because he was solely devoted to spiritual literature. He has worked very hard during the whole of his life. His stray writings have been collected and published as a book titled "Darshan and Chintan". We can see his approach towards philosophical thinking, national thoughts and social problems in his lectures on various subjects. His writings were not routine but revolutionary, his thinking was very deep, his comments were authoritative and his life as a whole was dedicated to spiritual and scriptural knowledge.

### **His Outlook for Life:**

Pandit Sukhlalji could do so much work in literature only because of his outlook for life. He kept his own necessities to the barest minimum and gave all facilities to own necessities to the barest minimum and gave all facilities to his assistants and colleagues. He took unavoidable services only from others. He was self-supporting as much as he could. This was his way of living life. Many people came forward to help him but he depended only on his own earning. He never had more than two pairs of clothes. He kept only one mattress and a covering. He believed in simplicity and cleanliness. He had no house of his own. He had no more requirements than were really needed. It is for this reason that he could straightway tell the truth to others. He expressed his views most courteously and with love. Because of his straight forwardness and insistence for truth, he was disliked by many but he did not mind for it.

He was the direct illustration of the saying "Learned is respected every where". He was respected wherever he went. It was natural that the people will honor such a man. He was awarded VijayDharm Soori Jain Sahitya Gold Medal in 1947. He was honored by the degree of D.Litt. By the Gujarat University in 1957, the Sardar Patel University in 1967 and the Saurashtra University in 1973. The Government of India honored him by awarding Padma Bhushan in 1974. Even before this, the Government of India since 1961 granted him pensions by giving him Certificate of honor for Sanskrit. The Sahitya Academy of Delhi granted him prize of Rs.5000 for his "Darshan and Chintan". The Government of Mumbai also gave him prize for this work. His admirers had formed Pandit Shri Sukhlalji Samman Samiti in his honor and he was honored in 1957 at Mumbai under the Presidentship of Dr. Radhakrishnan. He was given a bag of Rs.75,000 on this occasion. Panditji formed Gnanodaya Trust with this amount and decided to use this amount for the expansion and creation of Indian religion and philosophy. He was awarded the title of VidyaVaridhi by Naav Nalanda Vihar of Bihar in 1975 AD. It was with his inspiration that Parshvanath Shodh Sansthan at Bihar and L.D. Prachya Vidya Mandir at Ahmedabad was established.

## **His Method of Working:**

Panditji first of all collected all information about which he wanted to write and then he was continuously dictating in a lonely place keeping his diet at barest minimum. He was arranging everything in mind at the first stage and then constantly dictated the same with unbroken link. He spared much less time for food and daily routine work of natural calls etc. We do not feel from his writings that he had no eyes but we see deep learning, study and very wide outlook in all pages and phrases.

## **Conclusion:**

He was always active and self-supporting. He contributed to all fields of learning across which he came to pass. There is no blind faith but purely logical faith. The world has been benefited by his widespread knowledge. He has followed the views of Mahatma Gandhi in politics and social up-lift. He has used his broad outlook in following Mahatma Gandhi and also Lord Mahavir in the matters of religion and scriptures. His writings evolve comparative studies and compromising attitude. This indicates his tirelessness in appreciating philosophical aspects.

Ordinary it can be said that Pandit Sukhlalji does comparative and relative study in philosophical, cultural and spiritual subjects for the first time in Gujarat. He tried to give us essence of all religious like a bee collecting honey from several flowers. And this was not in writings alone. He also followed his life accordingly. It is for this reason that we see balanced consideration of all religions in his writings. Pandit Sukhlalji defined Religion like this: To discard impurities and weakness from life and restore all round cleanliness and equitable strength in its place is the true culture of life. This is only famous since in its place is the true culture of life. This is only famous since old age in all countries and castes in the name of Religion.

Simplicity, satisfaction, self-service, self-dependence, sincerity for truthful work, total faith, longing for truth where there are differences and conflicts and service to the goddess of knowledge till the last breath of life were the virtues strongly held by Panditji. His life is a lamppost for all of us. He did not run away from life even though he lost his invaluable eyes. On the contrary, he took it to be a challenge to himself and came out victorious. He was really a first rank learned personality of this century.

## **Last Years of Life:**

He worked at different places in different institution will 1960. But after undergoing a major operation, he had started winding up his activities. Though he was well within a short time, he desired to remain under deep thinking fully introverted at a distance from busy world outside. He was about 75 years of age at this time but he lived for 22 years more. In spite of this he could hear, think, speak and move like a young man. He had stopped going out and hardly granted visits. He had curtailed his activities of writing. He was now hearing on various subjects of his interest but this was almost negligible during the last seven years. Thus, he was totally away from activities in his ending years of life.

He was taking very little food since last 20 years and had not touched sweets, pulses and tasteful items since 35 years. He took selected fruits only. He had stopped taking heavy food altogether. He took only liquid food during last ten years. He was suffering from any appreciable disease. He had an operation of prostate gland and it troubled him at times. Otherwise he had no blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes etc. Doctors advised him to take solid food but he was accepting only liquid food and that too much less.

He was sufficiently aged and had trouble in passing urine. Even then he could go for latrine and urine until 15 days before his demise. His relatives had sifted him to V.S. Hospital as his urinal trouble had

increased. He passed away on 2 March 1978 in this hospital. We shall bow down our head to such a great personality of the age.