

Report on the accident of Param Puja Munishri Jambuvijayji Maharaj Saheb*

Hiroko Matsuoka

(PhD Student, Hiroshima University, Japan)

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This humble report is dedicated to all the friends and students of Param Puja Munishri Jambuvijayji Maharaj Saheb, with my deepest sorrow and sympathy.

Summary of the event

Param Puja Munishri Jambuvijayji Maharaj Saheb, seven other monks, seven nuns and I left Nakoda (Barmer District, Rajasthan (RJ)) for Jaisalmer (RJ) on 9 November 2009 on pilgrimage, when on the fourth day, the road accident occurred. At 6:55 AM on 12 November 2009 on the Balotra-Barmer road, Muni Jambuvijayji and three of his disciples were brutally hit by a speeding jeep from behind. At that time, I was walking with the nuns at a distance of four kilometers ahead of the monks. As soon as we heard of the accident, we rushed back and found four monks lying in a pool of blood on the road. Munishri Jambuvijayji (eighty-seven years old) and his disciple Namaskarvijayji (thirty-four years old) were already dead and cold. Their bodies were cremated on 13 November 2009 in Shankheshvar (Patan District, North Gujarat (GJ)).

Circumstances**

9 November :

Eight monks, seven nuns, one assistant, one driver and I started the pilgrimage towards Jaisalmer from Nakoda (Barmer District, RJ). We walked about 15 kms. in the morning and evening and stayed overnight at a school near Tilwala.

10 November :

We walked 15 kms. and stayed overnight at a school in

a small village north of Tilwala.

11 November :

We walked 15 kms. and stayed overnight at a school about 13 kms. east of Baitu on the Balotra-Barmer Rd.

12 November : 5:30 AM

Jinendraprabhashriji, the other six nuns and I left the school for Baitu (Barmer District, RJ).

6:30 AM

The eight monks left the school. Jambuvijayji led his group by taking the hands of both Dharmagoshvijayji and Himavantvijayji. Namaskarvijayji followed these three monks with a wheelchair in order to assist Jambuvijayji whenever necessary. The other four monks walked slowly with an aged disciple Dharmachandravijayji, who was using a wheelchair. An assistant and a driver, after cleaning up the rooms at the school where the monks and the nuns stayed the previous night, followed the monks, one by a bike and the other by a truck.

6:55 AM

According to Himavantvijayji, who was the only eyewitness, the four monks, who were walking together on the left edge/side of the road, were hit by a speeding Toyota Qualis from behind. Namaskarvijayji was killed instantly. At that time, the car as well as the wheelchair, onto which Namaskarvijayji rolled, caused Jambuvijayji to topple over Namaskarvijayji. Jambuvijayji's head was hit very hard, and his stomach and bones were crushed, but he still breathed unconsciously. Dharmagoshvijayji, who was taking Jambuvijayji by the left hand, was knocked unconscious and both his legs were crushed. Himavantvijayji, who was taking Jambuvijayji by the right hand, was severely injured in the legs and unable to move, but was screaming for help. The Toyota Qualis came to a stop about 50m away from the scene after hitting them, and four of its passengers ran away into the bushes.

7:00 AM

According to Himavantvijayji, Jambuvijayji stopped breathing. No aid was available.

7:10 AM

According to Pundarikaratnavijayji, Pundarikaratnavijayji and the other three monks, who were one kilometer behind Jambuvijayji and the other three monks, reached the scene of the accident by foot.

7:20 AM

A driver informed us that there was a serious accident in which some monks had been crushed by a jeep, while others sustained serious injuries. Greatly shocked by such tragic news, all of the nuns and I, who were approximately 4 km ahead of the scene of the accident, rushed back to the scene almost running the entire way, breathlessly. It was a horrible scene to see Munishri Jambuvijayji and Namaskarvijayji lifeless and the old monk Dharmaghoshvijayji almost unconscious, as he was dragged about five meters by the speeding car.

8:00 AM

The police came from Baitu, approximately 12 km away (Banner District, RJ). At the same time, an ambulance car arrived from Balotra (Barmer District, RJ), some 35 km away. Only Dharmaghoshvijayji and Himavantvijayji were taken in an ambulance to the hospital, and the dead bodies of Jambuvijayji and Namaskarvijayji were taken to Nakoda by car. Since I had a camera, the police asked me to take two photographs of Namaskarvijayji on the road and a photograph of Jambuvijayji in the car.

8:30 AM

We reached a hospital in Balotra.

9:00 AM

The bodies of the deceased monks were kept uncovered

for darshan for visitors and devotees at the Nakoda Parshvanath Jain Derasar located 12 km away from Balotra. There was a heated discussion that the bodies of these monks should be cremated at Nakoda, since they were there for the entire rainy season (*caturmasa*). Nevertheless, various samgha leaders finally decided to take the dead bodies to Shankheshvar where Munishri Bhuvanvijayji (Guru and Father of Jambuvijayji) was cremated.

13 November : 1:00 AM

We left Nakoda for Shankheshvar by car and traveled about 350 kilometers.

7:00 AM

We reached the Agama Mandir in Shankheshvar, where the bodies were kept for darshan. .

3:30 PM

The bodies were set on separate palanquins (*pālakhī*).

4:00 PM

The funeral march (*antimayātra/pālakhīyātra*) proceeded towards a crematorium (*samādhi*) 2 kms. away from the Agama Mandir via the Shankheshvar Parshvanath Jain Derasar. Thousands of people from all corners of India were present.

5:00 PM

The cremations (*agnisamskāra*) started.

9:30 PM

The cremations ended.

14 November :

Their bones were collected into small cans. Jambuvijayji's ashes were divided into hundreds of packages for gifts for the condolers.

18 November :

The Tapagaccha Jain order, to which Jambuvijayji

belonged, held a Requiem Mass (*guṇānuvāda sabhā*). At the mass, the chief monk of the Tapāgaccha (*tapāgacchādhīpati ācārya*) accused the Anoop Mandal of the accident.

28 November :

Five monks including Himavantvijayji, seven nuns, one driver and three assistants left Shankhesvar for Patan (North GJ).

29 November :

I joined the pilgrimage from Mujapur, 12 km away from Shankheshvar, to Patan.

2 December :

Everyone safely reached the the Sagar Jain Upashraya in Patan. From there, I left for Ahmedabad.

12 December : 9:00 AM

A Requiem Mass (*guṇānuvāda sabhā*) was held at the Sagar Jain Upashraya in Patan.

3:00 PM

A memorial service (*navvānu prakāri pūjā*) was performed at the Pancasar Parshvanath Jain Derasar in Patan.

Present Condition

Dharmaghoshvijayji, who was hospitalized in Jodhpur (RJ) after the accident, has since regained consciousness and will hopefully be able to leave the hospital this January. The other monks and nuns are expected to settle in Patan for not less than one year in order to study with local pundits in the hopes of someday fulfilling Jambuvijayji's last desire. Jambuvijayji was adequately prepared for the manuscript scanning project in Jaisalmer from December 2009 to March 2010, as he was in Patan from February to June 2009.

The hit-and-run driver was caught by the police of Baitu on 12th November, but unbelievably, after only ten days of

being detained, the driver was released on bail. The police have not confirmed whether or not he is a member of the Anoop - Mandal or even if he is an actual criminal.

Social Repercussions

Prior to this accident, four nuns were also killed in a road accident near Mahesana (North GJ) on 9 November 2009. Most people in the Jain community do not believe that the Jain monks and nuns were killed by simple misfortune, but strongly suspect that the Gujarat-based anti-Jain cult group “Anoop Mandal” was involved in these unnatural deaths. One easily finds sensational articles headlined “It was not an accident (*akasmāt*) but a plot (*śaḍyantra*)” or “Who is the criminal?”, etc, in various newspapers and magazines. As mentioned above, the chief monk of the Tapagaccha officially accused the Anoop Mandal of the incident at the Mass. Even on the short journey from Shankheshvar to Patan, the group that had been with the now deceased Jambuvijayji were very frightened that members of the Anoop Mandal might attack them. All the members of the group suggested that I avoid the pilgrimage, as members of the Anoop Mandal might know of my presence from the newspapers. However, I joined them again with strong will and confidence, and the pilgrimage turned out to be safe.

On the contrary, most non-Jains as well as the police seem to perceive the accident very lightly, as one of many accidents which occur all over India. Unfortunately, they do not realize that this accident has taken the precious life of a saint who was noble, knowledgeable and highly respected among intellectuals all over the world.

My analyses or impressions

I cannot judge whether the incident was an accident or premeditated murder, as I was 4 km away from the scene when the accident happened, and I am also a foreigner. On the one hand and as far as I could tell at the scene of the accident, the

following circumstances would lead me to believe the incident was an accidental homicide: 1) With the distant range of the small hills behind the Nakoda-Badmer Rd, the car may have come from the hills in an accelerated speed and out of control; 2) Approximately fifteen minutes after sunrise, the bright and white color of the sky blended with the white clothes of the Jain monks and nuns, and therefore the monks may not have been sighted in time for the driver to avoid hitting them; and 3) The driver of the Toyota Quails was driving at an exceedingly high speed and could not slow down in time to prevent hitting the monks. Needless to say, none of the monks were at fault for what happened.

On the other hand, these conditions do not easily answer a pertinent question: Why was it that Jambuvijayji, who was walking at the safest point in the middle of the group on the corner of road, was the most injured by the car? The driver must have already seen the group of four monks that were one km behind Jambuvijayji and had safely passed them. Why did the driver knock over Jambuvijayji's group? For these reasons, this accident remains a mystery and is in need of further investigation by the authorities.

Lastly, I would like to offer my humble opinion. As a Japanese student who has been studying in India for the last two years, I am greatly impressed by the Jain mendicants, who walk from place to place regardless of cold or hot temperatures. People normally pay a lot of respect to them. However, this incident has opened my eyes to two major problems: the government in general does not enforce road rules very strictly, and the Jain mendicants, although usually taken very good care of by the Jain community, increasingly face difficulties in finding proper accommodation in small villages on their pilgrimages.

I strongly wish and feel that the Indian people and the government must make the roads safer and enforce strict laws without hesitation. Traffic law and order is very poorly enforced

in India. Moreover, one can get a four-wheeled vehicle driver's license without being tested first, and by giving some money if one already owned a two-wheeled vehicle. Therefore, most car drivers are untrained and pose as serious threats to two-wheeled vehicle drivers and walkers. Meanwhile, as a remarkable development in the Indian economy, well-surfaced roads are being constructed everywhere, and the middle class can purchase cheap cars such as TATA NANO. I am not surprised to read newspapers reporting many vehicle accidents every day, and I can easily imagine it will get worse in the future. Whatever be the case, I am still extremely shocked that the driver of that car could so easily kill innocent Jain monks, who were walking on the side of the road, especially when there were very few vehicles on that road. To make matters worse, the police of Baitu are not taking the matter seriously.

As for the Jain community, most of the Jains have migrated to big cities like Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai and Ahmedabad, leaving no Jains in the villages to assist Jain mendicants, rendering them helpless. Therefore, the Jain communities should make arrangements such that the mendicants always have escorts from one village to another. I was pleasantly surprised when I witnessed a local escort leading the mendicants on a small road headed in the direction of their next stop of pilgrimage in order to ensure their safety. Additionally, the arrangement for Jain food (*gocari*) and boiled water is also important. I have seen with my very own eyes the troubles faced by monks and nuns on pilgrimage when they do not get proper food and water.

I sincerely request the Mahajanas or the chiefs of villages to look after every facility intended for Jain mendicants in their villages. In turn, the villagers will also benefit by the presence and knowledge of the mendicants.

*I am deeply indebted to Pu. Munishri Himavantvijayji and Pu. Munishri Pundarikarativijayji for their relevant and useful input as well

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**Find the places on this Google Maps link:

<http://maps.google.co.in/maps/ms?hl=en&ie=UTF8&msa=0&msid=100978103501057315681.00047a4ed8beOc6d8d258&ll=24.537129,72.993164&spn=4.526251,7.064209&z=7>
