

THE SAINT OF RĀNĀWĀS

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*Lives of great men all remind us,
We can make our lives sublime;
And departing they leave behind us,
Foot-prints on the sands of time.*

“Blessed are those who live for others; toil hard day and night and undergo suffering so the other might live in peace and happiness,” said an ancient sage. How many of us are conscious or how much we take from society and how little we return to it. Here is a person who has sacrificed all material pleasures and comforts for the emancipation of society.

Śrīyut Kesrī Malji Surāṇā, popularly known as ‘Kākā Sāheb’ has a multifaced personality—a social worker, a religious teacher and preacher, an educationist, a farsighted and efficient administrator, a builder, a financial wizard, disciplinarian—all rolled in one.

As a social reformer he waged determined war against some of the social evils like *pardā* system, seclusion of women, death feasts and wasteful expenditure on social ceremonies long ago. He fought valiantly and he has succeeded to a considerable extent in mitigating some of these evils. He is a champion of women’s education because he firmly believes that ‘home is the first school and mother the first teacher of the child.’

Śrī Surāṇā Sāheb is great educationist. He has been striving hard for more than three decades to spread the light of education in this backward rural region. In fact, he has been the pioneer in this field. The credit for setting up this enviable educational complex in Rāṇāwās, which is often referred to as ‘Vidyā Bhūmī’—The land of learning, goes largely to him. Vidyā Bhūmī provides facilities for education from primary to the University level at a very low cost within the easy reach of rural masses. He is keen to see this complex develop still further & cater to the needs of those who wish to go in for post-graduate studies. Surely this educational complex with its infra-structure can develop into a Rural University in the course of time. What is remarkable is that besides providing education all the institutions lay particular stress on character building. We aim at turning out not simply literate persons but really educated young man of sound character. Any institution which can perform this twin job is bound to earn the gratitude of mankind. The educational institution of ‘Vidyā Bhūmī’ are free from all those maladies



which pose a challenge to the educationists of the country and seem to threaten the very foundations of our educational framework. The institutions here work on the ancient *Gurukula* lines under the dynamic leadership of Śrī Surāṇāji. Even a casual visitor to the *Vidyā Bhūmi* is reminded of Pt. Madan Mohan Malviya, the founder of Banaras Hindu University. Dr. D. S. Kothari, Ex-Chairman U. G. C. and at present Chancellor J. L. N. University, who was good enough to pay a visit and spend three days with us two years ago, paid a rich tribute when he observed, “How we wish we could have at least twenty such Rāṇāwās scattered all over the country.” But we will need twenty Kākā Sāheb for such twenty complexes; and the question is from where to get them.

Śrī Surāṇāji is a dedicated disciple of Ācārya Tulsi. This religious soul spends about 15 hours daily in meditation and other religious pursuits. His daily time table is very rigid where every minute is valuable. He has a wonderful memory and he seldom forgets a person who has met him, or an incident howsoever old it may be. He has learnt by heart *Pratikramaṇa*, *Pachhisa Bol*, *Bhaktāmar stotra* and *Mantras*. The accounts, names of donors and details pertaining to donations, resolutions passed or decision taken long ago are all on his finger tips.

Kākā Sāheb is a man of strong will power and firm determination. He is known for his robust optimism. The word ‘impossible’ does not exist in his dictionary. He believes in expansion with consolidation. He always emphasizes that decision should be taken after great care, cool thinking and due consideration of all the aspects, but once the decision is taken he has no peace till it is executed. He is a great builder. The magnificent buildings and the imposing campus bear ample testimony to his engineering skill.

He is a practical economist. He follows rigidly the sound business maxim, ‘cut your coat according to the size of the cloth.’ He always says, “Do not touch the capital, utilize only the interest,” because one cannot live on capital for long. To him goes the entire credit of building a very strong and sound financial base for the *saṁsthā*.

Simple living and high thinking, austerity and self denial characterise his life. One really wonder how he manages his household with just Rs. 100/- a month in these hard times when every thing is so expensive.

It is because of the various sterling qualities that Surāṇāji is held in high esteem by everybody. He enjoys a unique place in the Jain community and is rightly called ‘*The Gandhi of Terāpantha*.’ He will always be remembered as a great benefactor, a philanthropist, a dādicated selfless worker and a lover of men.

He has completely indentified himself with the lofty ideas of the *Mānava Hitkāri Saṅgha* and has translated the principles of Jainism in actual life and has followed religiously the great teachings of Bhagawāna Mahāvīra. He is indeed an institution by himself.

Long live Śrī Surāṇāji !

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