

## 09. Samaya Drushta Shri Vijay Vallabh Soori

Shri Vijay Vallabh Soori was born at Vadodara, which is considered to be a city of high culture and education in 1871. This day is celebrated as Bhai Bij where a sister invites her brother for dinner and wishes him all happiness of life. Smt. Lehehabai and Shri Deepchandbhai were his parents and his childhood name was Chhaganbhai. He had three brothers and three sisters. The family was deeply impressed in Jainism since generations and it had become the tradition of the family. Religious impressions were very deep on every member of the family. The parents were very simple, well cultured, sympathetic and absolutely honest. Shri Deepchandbhai died in the childhood of Shri Chhaganbhai and mother also did not live long to bring up her children with traditional virtues. The mother had said to Shri Chhaganbhai during the last moments of her life, "my son, accept the shelter of eternal religion and remain at the mercy of Lord Arihant because only by this type of living you will be happy. Spend your life in doing good of all and all living animates on earth." The child Chhaganbhai was of the age of 10-12 years at this time and yet his tender mind was deeply moved by this last advice of his dyeing mother.

As Chhaganbhai lost his father and mother at short intervals, he was very much unhappy. He passed each and every day with much trouble. He could hardly passed standard seventh but till then he remained in the company of saints and constantly visiting Jain temples and Upashrayas (places of worship and meditation). This fact indicates that he had good impressions of his previous lives. He had no mind in business, trade, homely work or worldly affairs. He was constantly thinking of eternity. Just then an unusual event look place.

If we see deeply, it appears that in the spiritual advancement of any individual, the company, guidance and help of saints and good teachers have a great contribution. And if a very great saint catches his hand, it is the rise of his good deeds of previous lives; and that is why it is said:

There is much difference between Paras (a stone which converts everything to gold on its touch) and a saint. The Paras will turn iron into gold. But the company of a great saint or a teacher is a blessing by which an ignorant man as well as a beast will turn to be a man of god.

### A Touch of Paras:

Acharya Shri Atmaramji who was a big personality, an idol of absolute restraint and invested with full knowledge happened to be at Vadodara in 1942. As soon as young Chhaganlal heard his lectures, his mind began to dance with pleasure. The lectures were on achieving detachment with the world. His heart was pierced through. He dedicated his whole life to the feet of saint Atmaramji. Saint Atmaramji was an exceptional personality. He proceeded in search of eternal truth by his own intuition. He was born in the family of warriors in Punjab and took Dixa also in Punjab. He studied great books on Jainism and attained great inspiration for the search of eternal truth. He, therefore, adopted Jainism in public. His outlook was very wide, his heart was full of kindness and sympathy, Thirst for virtues, deep knowledge of various scriptures, unbeatable desire to be under Jainism and study its highest literature were the essential qualities of his nature. He had a big group of disciples and they awakened the followers of Jainism for truthful meditation and religious rites for about three decades.

When the saint Atmaramji completed his lecture and all went home, the child Chhagan was alone seated there. Seeing him Acharya Shri Atmaramji questioned, "O child! Why are you seated here? What is your trouble? Do you want money etc.?" The child replied in affirmative and then Acharya asked again, "how much money do you want?" The child replied, "which will never be exhausted, just you have it". Hearing this, the Acharya was greatly pleased. He thought that the child is spiritually

advanced. This came to be true. The child asked for Dixa and Acharya said that it would be granted at an appropriate time. The child was, then sent home.

## **Dixa, Study of Scriptures and Separation with Saint-Teacher:**

There are many Jains in Radhanpur town of North Gujarat. Acharya Shri Atmaramji was camping here along with his large group of disciples to pass the four months of rainy season in 1887. The ardent desire of Chhaganlal was about to be fulfilled. With the consent of his relatives, Chhaganlal was granted Dixa in 1887 at the holy hands of respected Mooni Shri HarshVijayaji and then the grandfather like teacher gave him the new name "Mooni" VijayVallabh. Young Chhaganlal was now on the way of detachment and renunciation and it was perhaps destined that he will rule over the hearts and minds of many people.

Mooni VijayVallabhji became steady in muttering of holy names on rosary, penance, leaving away tastes of food and drink, performing Pratikraman (religious rite) regularly. On the other hand he began his study in various scriptures of Jainism under the guidance of his great teacher popularly known as Bhaji Maharaj. He was also stepping up quickly on the path of renunciation and secluded life.

Acharya Shri Atmaramji had the permanent place in his heart, but his Dixa-guru, (the saint who gave him Dixa) Mooni Shri HarshVijayaji was not keeping well and he had to be in his service all day and night. He did his study late at night but served his Dixa-teacher very well and thereby cleansed his heart and mind also.

He stayed with Guruji at Delhi for passing monsoon season. The grandfather Guruji was to pass his monsoon in Ambala. All the mendicants, followers and disciples served Shri HarshVijayaji with best of their efforts but he died. Newly adopted Dixa, Shri VijayVallabh was deeply pained. He could not be at rest for many days and hence he, alongwith his two colleagues, obtained the permission of Delhi Sangh and started to be with grandfather guru Shri Atmaramji at Ambala. They told the story of demise of Shri HarshVijayaji with tearful eyes. Dada-guru Mooni Shri Atmaramji said that we have to do much work in coming days and pacified VijayVallabh with love.

During the last three years Shri VijayVallabh Soori had studied almost all the scriptures in details while being in the service of Guru-teacher. This young mendicant desired to study more and more on religions and Darshnas etc and to fulfil this desire, he tried to study further under Mooni Shri Karmchandrajji at Amritsar and also under Pandit Uttamchandji. But he could not succeed much for various reasons. He then passed his monsoon of 1948 at Ambala with grandfather-teacher Shri Atmaramji Maharaj who had been enormously famous by this time in the whole of north India and also in many foreign countries Shri Veerchand Raghavji Gandhi was sent to represent for Jainism at the World Religion Conference at Chicago under the direction of Shri Atmaramji Maharaj. He propagated Jainism in America and Europe very well. Shri VijayVallabhji was seeing all these events and matters with his own eyes and this lead and inspired him to acquire more and more knowledge.

These were crucial years for India. The air of new age was expanding in the country slowly but steadily but one thing was very well realized that the society which will not keep pace with the advancing march of new vision, will be left out of development and progress not only in economic and political matters but also in social and educational matters. The pair of Atmaramji Maharaj and VijayVallabhji, therefore, thought the first need is not to create Jain temples but schools and study centers. They thought out a plan for this but in these days Atmaramji Maharaj expired at Gujranwala before his death he had entrusted the responsibility of completing this task to Shri VijayVallabhji in the presence of learned and wealthy persons getting co-operation from all sides of the society.

After coming out of the pains of death of Shri Atmaramji Maharaj, Shri VijayVallabhji decided to start with the following activities in Punjab:

- To establish Atmanand Jain Sabha in various cities of Punjab.
- To establish Samadhi-Mandir at Gujranwala in the memory of Shri Atmaramji Maharaj.
- To establish Jain schools at several places.
- Publication of Atmanand (Vijayanand)-periodical.

Shri VijayVallabh Soori completed all his plans sooner or later in his lifetime. Shri Atmanand Jain college was established with the encouragement of Shreshthi Shri Kasturbhai Lalbhai in 1938. Shri VijayVallabh Soori moved in various regions of Punjab for about 13 years after the demise of Shri Atmaramji Maharaj and did several works of educational, social, cultural and unity of Jain Sangh. He was not acknowledged as a great humanistic saint and was loved by many religious-minded personalities of Punjab. He had thus, completely obeyed his promise of preserving Punjab given to Shri Atmaramji Maharaj in his last days. Even though, Shri VijayVallabh Soori had his activities mainly centered in Punjab, he believed that the whole of land belongs to one god and he gave his services to Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra. In Gujarat he moved to Palanpur, Patan, Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara, Radhanpur, Dabhoi, Miyagam, Khambhat, Palitana and many other places; in Rajasthan he visited Sadadi, Falna, Bikaner and other places and in Maharashtra he went to Mumbai, Poona, Balapur etc. and passed his monsoons at these places. On the way he preached at many other villages and towns.

He spent last years of his life at the international city of Mumbai and passed away at noon at the ripe age of eighty-four.

## **His Works:**

Shri VijayVallabh Sooriji was a multi-faced personality. He had received inspiration and education from the most ardent celibate, age-dominating personality, deeply learned and fully developed grandfather teacher Shri Atmaramji Maharaj. Shri VijayVallabh Soori consolidated the attitudes of others and mine. He stressed for Japa-muttering holy names or phrases on rosary, penance, detachment, renunciation, sympathy, tolerance and equality for all living animates on earth. He encouraged others to be in the service of society. He believed that strong society only can hold the religion strongly and for this spiritual, as well as practical education is necessary. If one is spiritually educated, he will not be drawn away toward godlessness and unrestricted behavior. Modern education is essential for getting respectable position in society; otherwise no concrete progress will be possible in business, govt. Job, education, trading or social activities. His important works can be briefly summarized as under:

- Study and teachings of religious scriptures: He was very liberal in this respect. He had appreciated many books with a view to find facts and get knowledge with virtues. He established Jain Pathshalas (schools), educational institutions and Jain colleges at many places in Punjab, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Gujarat with the co-operation many local and outside persons for the advancement of religious knowledge. He renovated the hand-written books of the library at Shantinath Jain Temple at Khambhat during the monsoon of V.S. 1993 with a view that old literature of religion can go on being published. He then entrusted its management to Mooni Shri PunyaVijayaji.
- Mahavir Jain Vidyalaya: This institution was started in 1915 in a rented house at Mumbai with only 15 students and it was hoped that middle and lower class people will take advantage of it and receive modern education. This institution was entrusted with the work of publishing authentic Jain literature of very high level. The institution went on developing very fast and with the help and co-operation of thousands of old students, rich Jains and social workers, five more branches of this institution were opened at Ahmedabad, Poona, Vadodara, VallabhVidyanagar and Bhavnagar. This is perhaps the best of other social works dedicated to the society by Shri VijayVallabhji.

## Unity of Sangh:

Acharya Shri VijayVallabh Sooriji was a broad-hearted personality. He did not discriminate much between Jains and non-Jains. In this case, how can he accept the barriers of Gachchha, Matas, and Vadas-i.e. different sections in Jain community? And for this purpose he offered special contributions at the conferences of Moonis and mendicants held at Vadodara in 1912 and at Ahmedabad in 1934. He preached to avoid and shun differences of sects in Jainism wherever he went and arranged meetings and lectures for this purpose. All the followers of Lord Mahavir must be one on the name of Lord Mahavir, said he to everyone. Everyone may make prayers and meditation in his own way but the ultimate goal of all such rites is to secure holiness of soul.

## Reforms in Society:

AcharyaShri was an activist Yogi and so he is known as a Reformer of Samyagna. He was an exceptional great man to impress for co-ordination of three subjects: Dharm, Darshan and Society, i.e. the Religion, the Scriptures and the people at large. He used to say that if any Jain institution keeps itself away from Shravaks and treats the society and Sangh as untouchable; it will not be good for it. Every institution may contribute for the development of the society and make it free from undeserving addictions and other evils like non-vegetarian food etc. These institutions must awaken the ignorant society and make it full of virtues, disciplined and also learned. If this is not done, the institution itself will die. If the society is weak, illiterate, poor and frustrated it will be lead to blind faith and it will not give rise to great saints, judges, advocates, doctors, ministers, administrators, engineers, social workers, artists, historians, scientists, intellectuals, rich, industrialists, patriots, leaders, poets writers or outstanding players, he desired for strong, united, educated and awakened society where men and women are treated equally. He, therefore, took service to society as one of his important activities.

- He advocated being free from evil habits and keeping away from non-vegetarian food, wine, hunting etc. he pressed for education of poor and ignorant tribal people. He wanted that even the kings and rich people also should avoid wine, meat, hunting etc.
- Loving behavior: wherever he saw differences and conflicts, he intervened and established peace and love. He said to all Jains that they had One god, One holy stanza-Mantra and One way and hence they should not dispute on petty and trifling matters. He asked them to be peace loving and co-operative. Religion is to connect the hearts, not to disunite them. It is no religion with creates enmity and conflicts.
- Development of Middle Class: He did not like that a few persons in society be rich enjoying all happiness of life and others remain without food, cloth, shelter and education. He preferred to give work instead of money to the poor. He established workshops at Bikaner, Palitana, Khambhat, and Bombay and at other places where weaker section of the people would go and learn to do some work. He arranged for free training, food and clothing and even free books for the poor at these places. He tried for the uplift of poor and middle class persons. He firmly believed that excessive wealth keeps the man out away from religious thoughts and impressions and therefore, such people should come forward to help the poor and the needy.
- Change of direction of charity: He believed as the Jain temples are necessary to maintain religious culture, so the Pathshalas (schools for religious learning) and educational institutions are necessary for the development of society. He, therefore, inspired rich people to make charity in this direction so that charity to gods may not remain confide to temples only but may be used for education and development of the society. This was better way of making charity and must be adopted by the rich.
- A bridge between old and generations: He said very clearly in all his lectures and evening-discussions that the youth should not be ridiculed as atheists. He advised the youth that they should not laugh out elders as hypocrites or orthodox. They must respect all elders. The young as well as old have work jointly for the up-lift of society. He advised the family-holders not to remain engaged in untruthful social practices, false beliefs, bad doubts and evil

performances and advised the youth to learn hard and work for society. He advised the elders for pilgrimage, service for Jain temples, service to saints and mendicants, charitable activities etc.

- Unpreferable practices in society: Payment of money at the marriage for the bride or bridegroom, compulsory dinner party on completion of the vows of Atthai etc. wearing unholy cloths of silk, use of saffron in temples, soups made up of violence, use of things made from leather, girls not to be educated much and other ungraceful practices were prevailing in his days and he preached to avoid them outright by loving words and people honored his advice with respects.

## **Conclusion:**

It is difficult to understand the characters of great men. Shri VijayVallabh Sooriji had liberal views as broad as sea. He was not merely a Jain saint but a great saint of the whole of India. He was invested with the national attitude of respecting all the religions equally. He interpreted Dharm-religion for the good of all and everybody. He took out religion from short and narrow considerations like going daily to temple, do certain rites and then in practical life adopt all sorts of bad and good practices to earn money. We can know him as a personality of the age or of the century. The present prosperity and stability of Jain community owes very much to such saints and Acharyas who could see centuries and ages ahead of their time.