

## 22. Sampadak Ratna Pandit Shri Nathuram Premi

### Childhood and Young Age:

This great man was born in 1881 AD at Devri village of Sagar District in Madhya Pradesh. The family was quite ordinary and belonged to Porvad, i.e. a merchant generation. Originally from Mewar, several families had shifted to Bundelkhand in Madhya Pradesh for better living. His grandfathers moved on horses for selling joggers, salt and other household provisions in distant village and earned hardly four or five paise at the close of the day.

In these circumstances, Nathuramji was put up to a village school for study. He was very clever in study and always-maintained first or second rank in the class. His teachers loved him. He passed the teachers' training examination very easily and atonce got the service of a teacher. He was getting salary of one rupee and a half in the beginning, which came to be of rupees six at a later stage. He was therefore; habituated to live with minimum needs and this habit continued till the end of his life. He could, yet, save something because of his simple living without any avoidable habits and used all his savings for the publication of literary books and service to others.

Panditji served as a teacher for about two years. He came in contact with poet Amirali in these days and he was interested in making poems. His poems were printed in periodicals like "Kavya Sudhakar", "Rasik Mitra" etc. He wrote his poems under the nickname of Premi. In addition to writing his own poems, he made investigation on other poems also. His contacts with poets, writers and literary critics increased slowly and he was drawn to expand the scope of his writings. He was transferred to Nagpur in these days but he could not keep well there and returned to his native place very shortly.

### Towards Mumbai:

Just in these days he came to read an advertisement for the post of a clerk at Mumbai Prantik Jain Sabha in a newspaper. He applied for the post and soon got the order to join there. This was a historical town in his life. He had no money for railway ticket to go to Mumbai but this well wisher Sheth Khubchandji arranged for his ticket and landed him Rs.10. He, thus, joined the service of a clerk at Mumbai in 1901 AD. He had to make correspondence work for six-seven hours and maintain accounts of cash in his job. He had also to do editing of a monthly periodical Jain Mitra and post its copy of subscribers and others. He was learning Sanskrit, Marathi, Gujarati and Bengali in his spare time. Once his master suddenly examined his cash and accounts. Nathuramji showed him all the books and accounts with cash. Everything was in order and the master was much pleased but Nathuramji told him that he would no longer serve on the post, as he (the master) had not trust in him. He was persuaded very much but he did not change his mind. He, however, continued to work for the periodical Jain Mitra.

During his stay at Mumbai, Pandit Nathuramji came to know Shri Pannalalji Bakliwal, a great lover of literature. Shri Bakliwal had adopted life-long celibacy and had turned to the service of the people. He was known as Guruji-a great respected man in the local community. He was considered to be the most learned person among the Jains of these days. Nathuramji was deeply affected by his dedication, detachment, character and sympathetic nature. Premiji learnt Bengali from him. Pannalalji was also pleased to see the ability and selflessness of young Premiji and slowly entrusted him all the responsibility of the periodicals "Jain Hitaishi", "Jain Granth Ratnakar" and all of his office-work. In the beginning Premiji had the help and co-operation of Shri Chhaganmalji, the cousin of Shri Bakliwal in the work connected with Jain Hitaishi reached the stage of one of the most outstanding periodicals of all India level under the editor-ship of Premiji.

## **Co-Operation From Sheth Shri Manikchand, J.P.:**

At this time Premiji came in the acquaintance of Sheth Shri Manikchand. He encouraged and inspired the activities of editing and publishing of several periodicals and books at the hands of Shri Premiji. Shethji had the great credit of all-round services for Jain community. He helped for the development of Jain learning, Old scriptures, Jain places of pilgrimage and Jain students. He produced outstanding students and scholars in Jain community by granting them financial assistance. He was purchased 300-400 copies of all publications of Premiji at three-fourth of the published cost and sending them to Jain temples, Jain institutions, learned persons and students. He gave over almost all his property in charity and therefore Premiji established Manikchandra Digambar Jain Granthmala after his death. His Granthmala had donated many books of authority and high level to the society at a very low cost. This institution has been converted to Gnanpith some years ago.

## **Hindi Granth Ratnakar, Mumbai:**

Shri Nathuramji Premi established this institute on 24 September 1912 at Mumbai. He was tired of frequent changes in his service and he wanted to create his own source of income, which may be enough for his livelihood. Alongwith this he desired to expand the Hindi literature. He, therefore, established this institute with clean and holy purposes and he got unexpected success in this venture. He became very famous. We can realize this from his congratulatory book. He had wide experience of editing, research and publication and had handled periodicals like Jain Mitra, Jain Hitaishi and other Jain books of importance. He had very good hold on many languages like Hindi, Sanskrit, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati and Prakrit. This was the first and only series of Hindi books published in western India and it was intended to provide good books at lowest possible price. Premiji sacrificed all his efforts, earnings and talent for the development of this series of Hindi books. The members of his family were also displeased of Premiji's so much interest in this work. Even though Premiji's wife expired suddenly in 1932 and his only son Hemchandra also died in 1942, he continued his work with total dedication. This institute has gave many books of unusual importance to the society, particularly Jain community. The institute observed the following principles very strictly and this was the main reason behind its popularity all over India:

- Only the best books, which may be of much use of the people, be accepted for publication.
- To investigate, edit and make research of these books very carefully.
- To give high quality of printing with attractive lay out.
- To maintain good relations with writers and other publishers. They should not be treated as customers or competitions but heart-felt friends.

This publication house could get "Swadhinata" the famous books of Acharya Mahavirprasad Dwivedi and other well-known books of noted writers like Premchandji, Jainendraji, Chatursen Shastri and Sudarshanji for printing and publication only for its ideals principles of good dealing practices. Even after the rights of the writers had expired, he was giving financial assistance to them in unexpected circumstances of their hardships. As such almost all the publications of this publishing house were sold out very shortly and the publishers had not to ask for or wait for the critical remarks of known critics. In addition to this, the publication house worked for publishing history books independently and brought out many essays on literature also.

## **History of Jain Literature:**

This is a historical work of Premiji. He has discussed Logic (Nyaya), Scriptures (Darshan), Yoga, Grammar, poetics, figures of speech, Linguistics, Law of Karmas (deeds) and many other subjects in addition to the lives of great Acharyas personalities beginning from second century to thirteenth century. He wrote on highly learned personalities, including mendicants, practitioners in religion,

poets and literates also of several centuries. This book is of much use to the mendicants, historians and research scholars.

This was not enough. He discussed about "Nitivakyamrut" and "Aradhana", which were rarely available in addition to several books which, had not yet been published. He has included different thoughts of different thinkers, his own thinking on key-subjects, information about places of pilgrimage, historical reference to several characters, making of words from old languages, information about several generations, rulers, saints, intellectuals and so on. He did editorial work of Jain Mitra and Jain Hitaishi so well and with so much skill of his learnedness that both these periodicals became much famous for the quality of their subjects.

## **He Remembers Pragna Chakshu Sukhlalji:**

Shri Premiji had been in deep contacts with Pandit Sukhlalji for more than 30 years. They had intimate relation when Pandit Sukhlalji was in Agra, he always recited the following prayer written by Shri Premiji with his friends and students:

### **Prayer**

Oh kind Lord give us such talent that we will think of the good of the whole world and make more and more efforts to help others. I must understand as to how others will be happy and I must try to make them happy. I shall suffer all miseries that come to me but will not be able to see others suffering any pains. Let truth be my duty, truth be my activities, truth be my goal, Premi will pass his whole life in search of truth.

Pandit Sukhlalji liked this prayer very much. Sukhlalji was very much affected by the writings of Premiji in Jain Hitaishi. Premiji was a Jain Pandit and yet he was fundamentally secular. Pandit Sukhlalji was extremely pleased to know this.

Shri Premiji came to the residence of Shri JinVijayaji at Poona in 1918 AD, and Pandit Sukhlalji was also seated there. They welcomed Premiji by reciting a stanza of his above prayer. Thus, inherent love came out in words Sukhlalji was deeply appreciative of Premiji's works and they were bound by hearty attachment for life. Whenever Pandit Sukhlalji came to Mumbai, he would not miss to see Premiji and also stay with him. Pandit Sukhlalji had cultivated family like relations with Smt. Ramaben, -wife of Premiji, Hemchandra-his son and Smt. Champa-wife of Hemchandra. They used to go for a walk for hours together in the hilly areas of Ghatkopar and Mulund.

As Premiji had real "Sanmati Tark" of Pandit Sukhlalji, he was deeply respecting him for his deep learning and Premiji requested Pandit Sukhlalji to do similar editing of two other great books on Nyaya. Pandit Sukhlalji came in contact with Jugalkishore Mukhtar, Babu Surajbhanu Vakil, Pandit Darbarilalji "Satya Bhakta" and several other great men with the medium of Shri Premiji. With this, there was advanced discussion on literature, scriptures, history, philosophy, and research among these highly learned personalities.

Pandit Sukhlalji was deeply influenced by the simplicity, fearlessness and secular nature of Premiji. Premiji had liberal and unprejudiced views on all subjects, his personal life was simple and truthful, he was always dedicated to his work, and he was always sympathetic to others. Premiji had said his three foremost desires to Pandit Sukhlalji. These were:

- To bring up the level of Jain learned personalities and establish their greatness in all corners of society.
- Jain holy places, particularly of Digambar Jains be renovated, preserved and identified and to take up the work of publication of Digambar Jain literature at the earliest.

- To remove shortsightedness in Jains, especially of women and more particularly of widows, to help them in their pitiable conditions and form out a concrete plan for these purposes.

**Conclusion:**

Premiji was born in a very small village. He achieved his greatness by his own efforts. He was famous as an editor, compiler, poet, critic and a literary figure. In the congratulatory book published at his age of 66 as many as one hundred and twenty-five learned and prominent persons, not only from Jain community but also from other walks of life have expressed their admiration for Premiji and this is the real tribute to the life and work of Premiji.