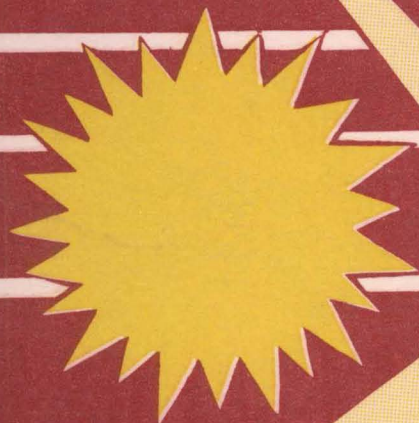


SANTBAL

A SAINT WITH A DIFFERENCE



T. U. MEHTA

'Santbalji has accepted the path of Social Service (Pravrutti Dharma) after good deal of thinking and discrimination. Those who do not understand the real meaning of "renunciation" (Nivrutti) would rarely think of co-operating with him. The lop-sided meaning of "renunciation" which is presently prevalent amongst some Jain thinkers cannot now be sustained. Otherwise, it is not possible to make Jain doctrines universally acceptable.'

– *Pt. Sukhlalji*

In "Darshan and Chintan"

Sept. 1954.

(Translated from Gujarati)

SANTBAL

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T. U. MEHTA



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Homage to Santbalji

It is with great joy that I read Shri T. U. Mehta's sketch of Munishri Santbalji's life and mission.

It was in mid-fifties that I had met Santbalji while I was travelling through Saurashtra in connection with Sant Vinobaji's Bhoodan Movement. He had very kindly presided over my public meetings at some places. One can still recollect his radiant personality, his beaming smile and gentle voice! We were in correspondence till the last phase of his life. Always post cards written in loving care! Yes, elegant simplicity was perhaps the essence of his being and teachings

Shri T. U. Mehta has given the details of Munishri's life indicating the process of maturity manifesting through every step that Santbalji took. The narration about his period of Total Silence for one year and the radical statement he released at the end of it will deeply move any Sadhaka!

Santbalji's adherence to Gandhian philosophy and to basic tenets of Jain philosophy had enriched his personality in an unique way. Non-violence must have been the breath of his life. The way he brought about a silent revolution in his total way of living and functioning must have baffled the contemporary Jain Munis and Shravakas. His blending of spirituality with social service, his attitude towards political problems and excessive trust in the Indian National Congress must have been riddle to many of his admirers and critics alike.

The Jain community should be grateful to Shri T. U. Mehta for writing a book on *A Saint With a Difference* in English language. The followers of Muni Santbalji would obviously find the publication of this book as a moral boosting to their work both at Mahvirnagar Chinchni and in Gujarat. It is their responsibility to keep the torch of Santbalji's teachings ablaze.

I am very grateful to Shri Ambubhai Shah for giving me an opportunity to pay my homage to Santbalji – that noble Jain Muni who transcended all dogmas, theories and sectarianism; who blossomed into a Vishwa-Manav broadcasting the message of Truth – Non-violence and Compassion to the whole human race. May the number of such apostles of Truth, Love and Compassion increase!

Dalhousie
28-6-1996

Vimla Thakar

Introduction

Here is the story of a Jain Saint who was a revolutionary in his outlook, who understood the basic principles of Jain philosophy in greater depth than those who charted the traditional way, and who silently suffered the penalties imposed on him by his contemporary traditionalists for his enlightened views.

Those were the days of rigidity of religious practice by Jain saints whose rocklike fundamentalism was buttressed by Shrawakas – their Jain followers, with the result that one who talked of reforms having regard to the progress of science in modern age, took a great risk of social boycott and expulsion from communal intercourse.

Jain saints of Sthanakvasi Sect have a very rigid and obscurantist way of life. They do not shave but uproot the hair grown on their body by plucking them by their own hands; they constantly cover their mouth with a piece of cloth called Muhapatti. They do not take bath regularly even in hot summer. They do not brush their mouth, do not touch a woman and do not use the seat occupied by a female. They treat every female saint with an air of male superiority and a male saint never bows to a female saint, however, senior and learned she may be, and they entertain a dogmatic belief that it is not open to a saint to take interest in the work of public nature such as help to the poor and needy and removal of evil social customs which result in gross injustice. All Jain saints are expected to move bare-footed even in hottest summer. They are expected to collect their food by accepting small quantities from the surplus offered by different families. They cannot keep money nor can they collect food or any other

article of necessity which is not of immediate use. They cannot put on stitched clothes nor can they use or possess any article of toilet.

Many of these practices are admirable and conducive to a strictly saintly existence. But with the passage of time some of them have not only become obsolete but result in unhygienic conditions and unnecessary torture of the body. However, any change in the later type of practices was vehemently resisted by the whole Sect.

Shri Nanchandraji Maharaj, a versatile Jain Saint who was influenced by the thinking of Shrimad Raichandji, Gandhiji and thinkers like Chhotalal Harjivan (Sushil) and Vadilal M. Shah and whom Santbalji accepted as his "Guru". He was a great reformist, a great orator, a poet and a dramatist and had great hold over Jains as well as non-Jains of the day.

Santbalji was greatly influenced by him and after entering into the order by taking "Diksha" under Shri Nanchandraji Maharaj, he deeply studied all religious scriptures under the guidance of his "Guru".

It was in 1937 after undergoing deep meditation in loneliness on the banks of the holy river Narmada for long one year constantly remaining under the vow of total silence (Kasta Maun) that he came out with a statement about some deeply-rooted traditions which all Jain saints were expected to observe strictly. This statement contained the following salient points. He said –

1. He would accept alms (Bhiksha) offered with love and devotion by anyone who was completely vegetarian and non-alcoholic irrespective of his caste, creed or religion.

2. He believed that all living beings stood on equal footing and hence the acceptance of customary respect from others resulted only in the increase of the ego in one self. He, therefore, requested

all those who respected him not to bow down to him but to embrace him with affection.

3. He renounced all titles (generally given to Jain saints).

4. The practice of constantly covering ones mouth with a muffler (Muha patti) observed strictly by the Saints belonging to Sthanakvasi Sect was not proper as it leads to unhygienic conditions. So he would cover his mouth only on some specified occasions.

5. The accepted tradition amongst the Jain saintly order that a male saint, however, young and unexperienced he may be, should never bow down to a Jain nun, however old and experienced she may be, is wholly irrational, grossly derogatory to womanhood and against the basic Jain doctrines and hence he would not follow the same.

6. The practice of uprooting the hair of head and face by hand is as disgusting as the old practice of being a "Sati" (widow burning alive on the death of her husband). Hard penances do not always lead to soul's upliftment. Many a times such practices generate a false sense of ego and thus become hindrances in the spiritual progress. He would, therefore, renounce this practice.

7. Cleanliness of a body is as important as the cleanliness of mind and soul. Hence the members of the saintly order should take bath and keep their clothes clean. The scriptures have repeatedly emphasised the necessity of cleanliness and have prohibited bath which is taken only with a view to adorn the body. Want of cleanliness produces germs and hence cleanliness is more conducive to the observance of non-violence.

8. He said, he realised from introspection and experience that the lives of those who have entered the saintly order should be devoted to the social good because a saint, when he leaves the worldly life, he enters a life which is universal and belongs to the

whole society. It is, therefore, his duty to try to find out the causes of social afflictions and make an attempt to remove them. This is quite consistent with the Shraman tradition of Jains.

Naturally, such a statement coming out from one who is learned and respected would shake the deeply-rooted traditionalists whose mental approach is completely oriented by notions which have little to do with the basic tenets of their religion.

The Jain community of those days, which was all admiration for the scholarship, integrity and character of this Saint, was up in arms against him. His Guru Shri Nanchandraji, who was himself a great reformist and who could appreciate the reformist zest of his dear pupil, was pressurised to disown him; he was declared an outcast and all Jains were directed to boycott him totally. For him these were the days of great mental and physical suffering. He was rendered alone and forsaken; some were ready to offer their discipleship, but he firmly resisted such efforts saying that he did not want to be a party to the split in the "Sangh" (Jain organisation). He, however, remained undaunted and stuck to his principles and preferred to tread a lonely path of service through spiritual advancement.

The traditional belief was that a Jain saint should concentrate only on the path of self-realisation and should not care to undertake the activities of social amelioration which was none of his business.

Upadhyaya Shri Amar Muniji, a venerable Jain Saint of Bihar and a person who was considered an authority on the doctrines of Jain philosophy, was himself a great reformist. He has summarised this situation in the following words:

"Co-ordination of spirituality and social welfare was destroyed in many fields of life ever since middle ages. It has become traditional with the Jain saintly order to believe that saints are

concerned only with the liberation of their own soul and hence were not concerned with the plight of people or the society. On one hand his saintly order gladly accepted all sorts of facilities such as residence, clothes, etc. from the society but did not feel obliged to give anything in return to the society. They believed that they were exempt from the work of social nature under the pretext of “Nivrutti” (retirement from social life); the moment they gave some crammed sermons, they thought their duty to the society was over.”

“Thus since long a dangerously destructive belief has taken roots not only in the minds of saintly order but also in the minds of their followers that it was “sin” (for a Jain saint) to be connected directly with the work of social reconstruction. Santbalji dared to oppose such belief and destroyed the poisonous bondage of such mentality and engaged himself very actively in the work of social reconstruction.”*

Ethics and morality were the basis on which he wanted to reconstruct the social order. In this world of practical matters, the worldly-wise people consider morality as an unaffordable luxury. They seem to rely on the Darwinian principle of the “survival of the fittest” and believe that whatever strategy ensures our survival should form the core of morality. This attitude takes us to the culture of pre-historic days when life was nothing but a grim struggle for survival.

But human history has changed. Inter-dependence of human society has now become the core of a civilized existence and the evolution of a kind of universal morality has become a constant under-current of not only individual relationship but also of national and international relationship. Notion of the survival of the fittest is outdated. If so, values of life are required to be reviewed.

* Taken from the Preface of *Santbalni Jivan Sadhana*, Volume-II, page-5 written by Shri Dulerai Matalia, published by Mahavir Sahitya Prakashan Mandir, Ahmedabad.

Materialism has been the end of the main current of Western civilization. Even Marx and other social thinkers – with some rare exceptions – have always sought human happiness and social harmony on the material basis, not on spiritual basis. as is being done by oriental thinkers. But capitalism as well as communism have failed to bring harmony in the social structure.

The root question is: How this social harmony can be established? Has materialism which is based on the pursuit of self-interest not failed to establish social harmony? Is it desirable to continue the state of social imbalances and conflicts? Do we do not need to reconsider all these problems afresh? There is nothing new in such reconsideration. All sober philosophers and thinkers of the world have already shown the way which Santbalji has re-emphasised by stating that the only answer to our problems is the reconstruction of the human society on moral and ethical basis – not on material basis of self-interest.

He further pointed out that the social forces should have harmony and should maintain proper balance as between them and if such a balance is not maintained, the matter should be set right by what he called “Shuddhi-Prayog”. This approach is quite logical and rational, though it may be difficult for us to follow in view of the wrong training which we have received through ages.

There were two basic postulates which guided the activities of social reconstruction undertaken by him. They were : (1) reconstruction of the social order on spiritual basis, (धर्मदृष्टिसे समावस्थान) and (2) trying to solve social incongruities by adopting methods which are consistant with the first postulate. It was his firm belief that both the postulates were consistant with Jain doctrines and should be adopted in every corner of India by the saintly order (vide Santbal’s Foreword to the Book titled *Darma Naya Samaj Rachana Ka Prayog* by Muni Shri Nemicahndra).

He, therefore, devoted the whole of his life to social causes and remained constantly engaged in the work of rendering aid to the

poor and needy by establishing voluntary organisations of various types, strived for removal of untouchability, communal amity, Khadi and village reconstruction. He organised a band of devoted workers and through them offered non-violent resistance to injustice and evil practices.

For his work field he preferred the area which was most backward socially, economically and culturally, where decoity, robbery and kidnapping of married women were very common, where people remained half-starved and some Harijan families sustained themselves by eating mutton of dead animals and by gleaning grains from animal excreta; where even drinking water was so scarce that if some water was found at a place by digging small pits, people used to cover the pit with a cot on which they slept over-night to guard the water from being stolen. This area is called "Bhal-Nalkantha". "Bhal" is the barren salty land where rain is very scarce and mainly wheat crop is grown during monsoon. Economically and politically this area was completely feudal in character. Feudal Lords and greedy merchants exploited the agriculturists who were mere tenants at-will and had no incentive to improve their methods of cultivation. Most of them worked on crop- share basis, the lion's share in the crop being taken by the feudal Lord and "interest oriented" usurious money-lender. There was no safety for the ready crop which was lying in open and many a times destroyed by an enemy. People sustained themselves mostly on meat of stolen animals and fish recovered from shallow and seasonal lake called Nal-Sarovar. The agricultural tenants and their family members including females and children were expected to render "Veth" (unpaid free labour and other services) to the feudal Lords without any protest. Majority of people remained constantly indebted paying heavy rate of interest to merchants. Dirt and disease prevailed due to constant water shortage.

Such was the area which he preferred for his work. The area was totally unknown, people were hostile, vested interests resented his presence. Initially nobody gave him shelter. People

had strange notions about Jainism and Jain monks who were wrongly supposed to resort to mesmerism and other occult practices. He had to pass nights in open under trees, walk bare-footed in blazing hot summer over foot tracks which were infested with insects and thorns. He took offerings only from those who were completely vegetarians and non-alcoholic. So many a times he had to go without food. These were the trials and tribulations through which he passed with courage and spirit undaunted.

With all these challenging troubles, he never disregarded the spiritual discipline prescribed for a Jain saint. Though he did rationalise some obnoxious practices, he meticulously observed all basic principles prescribed by the Jain scriptures, namely, truth, non-violence, non-stealing, restraint in possession and Brahmacharya and proved to his detractors how wrong they were in their understanding Jainism.

History of this nation is full of instances of the saints belonging to a particular religious order rendering social services to the people. But instances are rare where such saints have not attempted conversion of people to their faith, and trying to prove directly or indirectly the superiority of their own faith over others. Santbalji was rare exception; though he himself was a strict observer of all Jain doctrines and practices, he has never thought of proselytization of any of his non-Jain followers, and years after his death, people of his work area still remember him with great love and respect.

He was a great scholar. He wrote books on Hindu scriptures like Gita, Mahabharat, Ramayan and Bhagwat and also on almost every Jain scripture and followed the Jain doctrine of Anekantvad in its true spirit.

His memory was very sharp. He was a Shatawadhani means one who can remember one hundred questions of various types at one sitting and could correctly answer all of them in the same order.

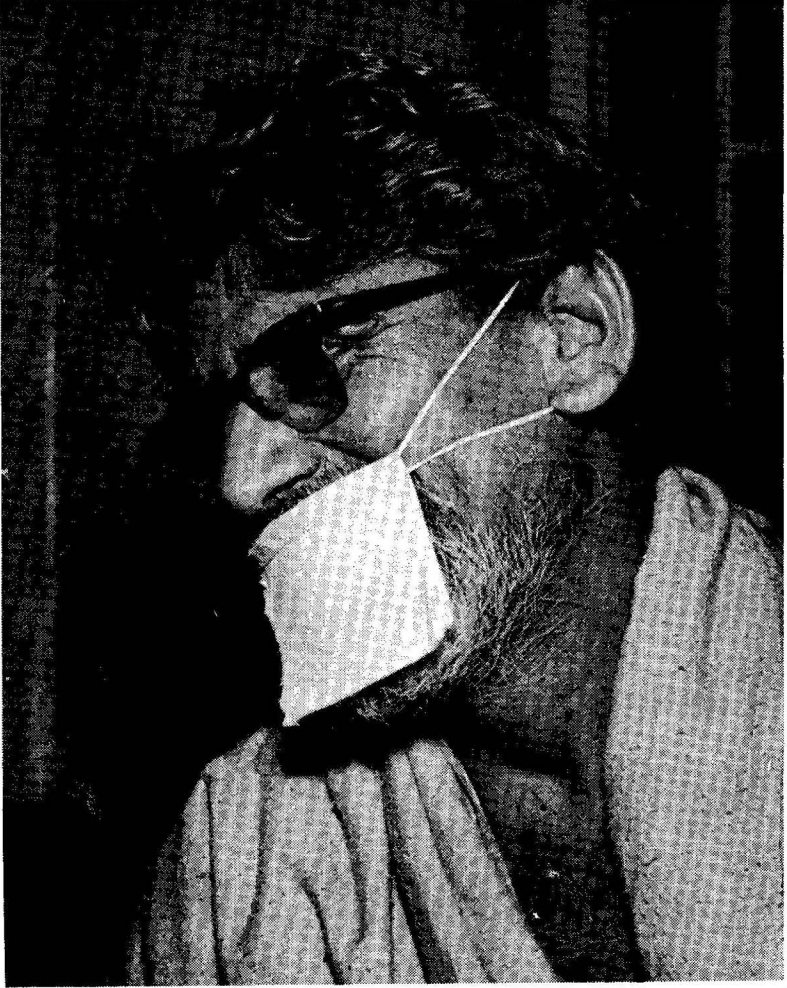
Such a Saint, who was head and shoulders above the simpletons who ex-communicated him, served as a beckon light to the whole saintly order of India – Hindu, Jain, Buddha, Islam, and Christian, and showed the way to lead the nation to the path of real social reconstruction which can put this country at the top of the comity of nations.

Even those who ex-communicated him, ultimately realised their mistake, but then it was too late to reclaim him in their order because by that time he had already entered the universal order where people at large – irrespective of their caste, creed or religion – recognised him as their spiritual leader and guide.

The short biographical account of his life which follows here proves, through various incidents in his life, the magnitude, amplitude and intensity of the social and spiritual services which he has rendered to the Society.

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T. U. Mehta

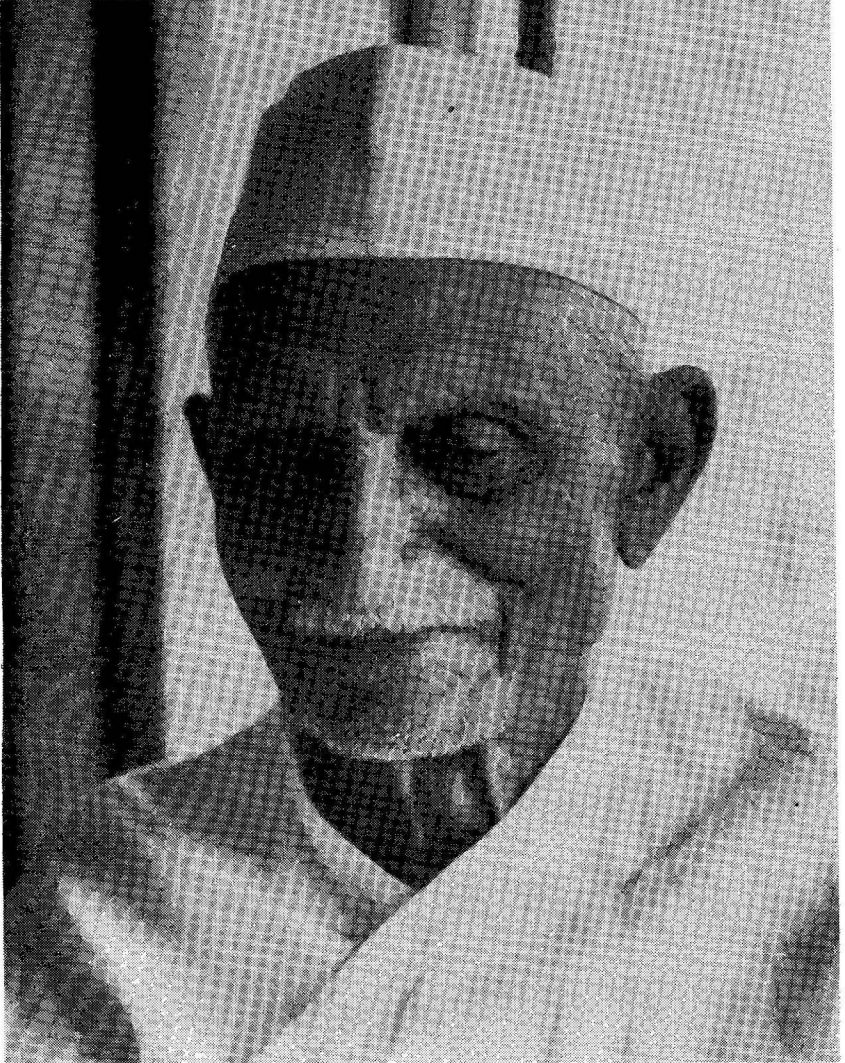


Muni Shri Santbalji

Birth : 26-8-1904 Friday

Kāladharma : 26-3-1982 Friday

Diksha : 18-1-1929 Friday



Ravishankar Maharaj

Birth : 25-2-1885

Death : 1-7-1984

Founder Member and President of
Bhal-Nalkantha Prayogik Sangh



Gulam Rasul Kureshi

Birth : 23-8-1898

Death : 17-12-1991

Founder Member and Vice-President of
Bhal-Nalkantha Prayogik Sangh

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A Chaturmas with a Difference

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CHAPTER 1

Place of Birth and Childhood*

If you have a look at the map of India you will find on her western coast a “U”-shaped peninsula whose shores are washed by the blue waters of Arabian ocean. This peninsula has served as the western gate of India through which India has remained in constant touch with the merchants of Arabia and the Middle East as well the countries of Eastern Africa.

As early as thousands of years ago Lord Krishna migrated with his men from U. P. and settled in this peninsula establishing the City called Dwarika. Dwarika means an entrance door. It is said that the original City established by Lord Krishna is now under the sea as the modern Dwarika is found at the apex of north-west point of peninsula. Years thereafter, another spiritual leader, Lord Swami Narayan also migrated from U. P. and settled over here.

This peninsula is known as Saurashtra meaning a “goods land”. The land is famous for its historisity and holy places situated in Mount Girnar and Mount Shetrunjay. The latter is the holy place of pilgrimage for Jains. On the south-western part of

* All the factual data referred to in the chapters 1 & 2 is taken from Volume of *Santbalni Jivan Sadhana* written in Gujarati by Shri Dulerai Matalia, as it is the only authoritative material available on the early life of Santbal.

the peninsula is the famous temple of Somnath which was once destroyed and plundered by Mohmed Gizni. In the heart of peninsula is the forest known as Gir Forest which contains rare specimen of world's lions.

This is the land where some of the great Saints, Litterateurs, Politicians and Educationalists were born, and this is also the place where the central figure of this book was born at village 'TOL' which is situated at a distance of four miles from the place called Tankara which was the birth-place of famous Swami Dayanand Saraswati. This place is also at a little distance from Vavania which is the birth-place of another great religious figure known as Shrimad Rajchandraji whom Mahatma Gandhi treated as one of his Gurus. On the southern portion of peninsula is a port called Porbunder, where Mahatma Gandhi himself was born. Near Mount Girnar is situated a City called Junagadh which was the place of abode of the famous poet-devotee Narsinh Mehta. Bai Mira is said to have migrated from Rajasthan to this peninsula and contributed some of her loveliest devotional poems composed in Gujarati. This peninsula has also given birth to the politicians like Sir Prabhashanker Patni, Uchchharangray Dhebar and Jivraj Mehta. Poets Botadkar, and Kalapi who have contributed a lot to the Gujarati literature, were born in this peninsula. The land has given birth to great journalists like Amrutlal Sheth and Shamaldas Gandhi and great contributor to the Gujarati prose and poetry like Manubhai Pancholi (Darshak) and Zaverchand Meghani. Eminent Educationalist like Nanalal Bhatt contributed his life service to this land.

The land has produced not only saints, but also saint-like outlaws (Baharvatias) who fought tooth and nail against the injustices caused to them and others by the then Ruler Kings and subsequently by the Britishers but who, at the same time, protected the poor, the females, the ailing and old persons of the population.

Santbalji, the Hero of this story, was born in a poor family of Jains at the above referred village Tol which had hardly the population of 500 souls. The main population of this village consisted of Mumnas-Mohmedans of Pirana faith who believe that Ram, Krishna and other Hindu Divinities were the prophets, but prophet Mohmed was the last of them. These people were originally Hindu Kanbi Patidars and were converted to Islam. The population had a few houses of other Hindus and Harijans also. One Ali Shah was the Imam of the local mosque. He was a very honest and upright religious figure who was respected by the whole village population. By intuition he could correctly forecast future events. There was one gentleman who was a potter by profession. His name was Khima Bhagat. He was a person completely devoted to God and was singing Bhajans of Kabir Saheb, Bhan Saheb, Dasi Jivan and Ramdevji, in the company of Motiben, the mother of Santbal at village congregations. The whole village society was contented, happy and devoted to God. The people were completely secular in their outlook and guided by a feeling of brotherhood.

Santbalji, whose original name was Shivlal, was the son of Nagjibhai Devjibhai and mother Motiben. Nagjibhai migrated from the nearby village "Arni Timba" to this place Tol and settled there by opening a shop. However, there was already one merchant of his own community residing in that village and, therefore, Nagjibhai could not earn much for his livelihood. Shivlal was born to this couple on 26th August 1904, which is equivalent to Shravan Sud 15th of Samvat year 1960. Shivlal had a sister called Maniben, who was five years younger to him.

Nagjibhai could not carry on his business well at Tol. He, therefore, on advice of his wife, migrated to Rajkot, a greater town, and hired a hutment in a low income group locality on the bank of River Aji. He had no money to establish a shop, but Motiben, his wife, prepared some sweets of drynuts, and

Nagjibhai used to sell these sweets in the town mainly to children. The couple was completely devoted to God and transparently honest in their dealings. In the hut which they were occupying at Rajkot a snake happened to appear often. However, they did not disturb the snake who was allowed to go on its own way. Once this snake appeared outside their hut with the result that the people of the locality gathered to kill it. Motiben and her husband Nagjibhai resented this attitude of neighbours and tried to save the life of the snake. Neighbours, therefore, taunted them for their religious whim to save the poisonous creature. Seeing their mood Nagjibhai caught the serpent and took it away to a safer place. However, this incident upset Motiben who thought that it was safer to return to her village Tol and pass her life in the religious company of Imam Saheb and Khima Bhagat.

An incident which occurred when the couple was at Rajkot, testifies to their nobility. It so happened that one gentleman named Amrutlal who was related to Motiben as her maternal cousin had visited India from Africa where he was residing. He happened to visit Rajkot. When he knew that Motiben was residing there with family, he visited Motiben alongwith two of his friends. Motiben welcomed them and asked them to sit for a while and herself went out of her house along with a valuable utensil. She sold this utensil to arrange for the proper welcome of the guests and returned to her house empty handed. Amrutlal noticed this and could realise the poor financial condition of his cousin. However, Motiben did not give any indication about her poverty. Amrutlal paid her Rs. 5/- as is customary for a Hindu brother to give some gift to his sister at the time of departure.

The couple thereafter returned to Tol, but Nagjibhai, the father of Shivilal, used to take the sweets prepared by his wife to Rajkot for sale and return home after 3-4 days. This obviously put strain on his health with the result that he was severely sick and ultimately died. It is said that the family was so poor that at the

time of the death of Nagjibhai, Motiben was not possessed of even two annas (1/8 of a Rupee) for performing obsequial ceremony.

Motiben the mother of Shivilal was a courageous lady. She was undaunted by her poverty and managed to pull on by stitching, tailoring and doing other domestic work of her fellow citizens. Her brothers-in-law were helping her by contributing one rupee each for her maintenance.

Shivilal had no scope for further education in his own village. However, his maternal uncle Manibhai was a teacher at the school of village Balambha; he was, therefore, put with his maternal uncle to take further tuitions. From his very childhood Shivilal was a bright student and at the new school at Balambha, he always held the first rank in his class. After Shivilal completed 4th Standard in the school at Balambha his maternal uncle Manibhai left the school and went to Bombay for earning. He left Shivilal with his maternal aunt Ujambai who took motherly care of Shivilal who also proved to be very useful to her in her household work. At the age of 13 years Shivilal completed 7th standard when he got full understanding of the financial difficulties through which her mother was passing, to maintain herself. Ultimately he, therefore, thought of leaving the school and decided to go to Bombay for earning. His mother and uncles thought he was too young to start his earning career. But he procured a promise from his maternal uncle, who had gone to Bombay, to look after him at Bombay. Therefore he left his studies and went to Bombay in 1917 A. D.

Shivilal had inherited all the qualities of the devoted and religious life of his parents and especially his mother Motiben. It is said about Motiben that she was very fearless and could find out a proper way to get out of the difficulties. Once Motiben and her brother-in-law Laxmichandbhai started by a bullock cart to

go to Balambha from her village Tol. On the way it was a night time and it became dark. After they entered into a dense bush of the jungle, about 4 to 5 muffled faced miscreants accosted them. The male members of Motiben's company were struck dumb by fear. But Motiben assessed the situation and shouted, "Uncle, I am Moti, the daughter of Pragji Vora; will you rob me ? I am going on a condolence visit on the death of my father. Instead of leaving me safely at my destination, you will rob me ?" The personal tone of her entreaties seems to have appealed to the miscreants who silently left the place without doing any damage.

CHAPTER 2

Life at Bombay

These inherited qualities of character helped Shivalal in his settlement at Bombay where initially he had to pass very difficult days. At the start he got a small job involving much labour at the shop of a relative. He had no proper residential accommodation and not even necessary facilities to take bath. This resulted skin disease. The employer was also harsh in his attitude and was often rebuking and insulting him without reason. Shivalal complained to his maternal uncle who advised him to resign. He was put to serve a Cloth shop wherein his uncle was a partner. But that shop was also required to be closed as it made losses. He then joined the services of a Parsee timber merchant at the salary of Rs. 35/- p.m. It was the firm of M/s F. K. Modi & Sons. One Rustomji who was managing the said firm was a kind gentleman. Shivalal acquired proficiency in conducting the timber business and his straightforward dealings created a very good impression in the market. This was well appreciated and his salary was increased. He became popular by his honest and straightforward dealings not only amongst the customers but also amongst other merchants in the line. There was one Muslim merchant in this line named Gulam Husein who also was reputed in the market for his honesty. He had good feelings for Shivalal. His son was good friend of Shivalal. On the unfortunate death of Gulam Husein, his son requested Shivalal to help him in his business. Shivalal agreed to help him on condition that he would not be a party to anything which was immoral or unbusinesslike. This was agreed. Shivalal

now got the salary of Rs. 160/- p.m. which was considered fairly a good income in those days. Shivlal was now out of financial difficulties. His personal life was simple and he could save good amount for his mother and sister.

Shivlal could now afford to spare some time for reading and getting the advantage of spiritual discourses of Saints. Honesty, industry, uprightness, courage to resist evils, and inclination to lead a purposeful religious life were the qualities which came naturally to him by inheritance from his parents. His intelligence and enthusiasm to know the things and study the ideas were much above the ordinary. He came in contact with some Jain Saints along whom one was Munishri Saubhagyamalji Maharaj, a Saint from Rajasthan. Being impressed by him Shivlal thought of accepting him as his Guru and taking Diksha as his pupil. However, when he came into contact with another Saint Shri Nanchandraji, he was greatly impressed by his oratory, lucidity and his zest for social reforms. By this time Lokmanya Tilak had given a call to the nation that to claim independence is the birthright of every citizen in India. Mahatma Gandhi was also the brightest star of Indian politics. He had given a call for Swadeshi. All this had great influence on the sensitive intellect of Shivlal. He began to put on Khaddar and tried to mould his life on the spiritual level. He was already free from the financial worries and his material prospects in life appeared to be brighter and brighter. He was coming closer and closer to Munishri Nanchandraji Maharaj.

His mother Motiben was now seeing the end of her trial. She was anxious to see that her only son and daughter, Shivlal and Maniben, were settled in family life. An early incident with Imam Saheb of the local mosque was more responsible for her anxiety to see that Shivlal was settled in family life as early as possible. Those were the days when engagements of one's own children

were the responsibility of parents and unlike the present day practices, children who were to be engaged had no choice in the matter.

The incident with Imam Saheb Alishah of Tol mosque was about the intuitive forecast once made by him about the future of Shivlal when Shivlal was still young. Motiben had noticed in two prior incidents that Alishah's forecast had wonderfully come true in case of the whereabouts of one Vallabhbai in Burma where he had gone for earning, and thereafter in case of the death of Khima Bhagat. Her motherly feelings lead her to ask Alishah about the future of Shivlal who was her only hope for the future. Alishah said that Shivlal had a very bright future and he would become either a millionaire in which case he would make a name as a philanthropist or he would become a big Yogi and a great spiritual leader who would shower blessings on many people. The mother wanted the first alternative to come true and hence she was anxious to engage Shivlal before it was too late. She, therefore, settled the engagements of both – the son and the daughter without waiting for the consent of either the persons concerned or other members of the family. Shivlal did not like this but he was helpless as he had no voice in the matter. Maniben was duly married but Shivlal went on postponing his marriage. He had not seen the face of his would be – wife nor was he allowed according to the prevailing custom, to communicate with her either personally or even through correspondence. He, however, used to send gifts to her through his mother Motiben.

Mother's Sickness and Death :

After the marriage of Maniben, mother Motiben was not keeping well. She was found to have some tumour (growth) in her stomach. Shivlal brought her to Bombay for treatment. She was operated successfully but after some time she was again sick. She was taken to Tol but she never recovered. Those days it was

customary to perform “Karaj feasts” (feasts on death) but the reformist elements strongly condemned this practice. So in spite of strong pressure from near relatives to abide by this custom, Shivilal resisted the same successfully. Maniben, the sister, was married and had gone to settle in the family of her husband, and dear mother who had toiled for the whole life against the heaviest odds was snatched away by nature when she was expected to see the days she longed for. All this had a good psychological impact on the mind of a sensitive person like Shivilal. His introspective thinking was leading him more and more towards the things spiritual, and he was more and more inclined to take Diksha and to enter the Jain order of Saints by totally renouncing the worldly life.

Gaining Spiritual Heights :

His near relatives including his dear maternal uncle sensed this feeling of Shivilal. They were very anxious to see that he got married. One Motilal, one of the near friends of Shivilal called Shivilal to Bombay from Tol where he had gone to perform obsequies of the mother. Reaching Bombay he found that one firm of B. K. & Sons was ready to engage his services on the salary of Rs. 200/- p.m. and six annas share (a little more than 1/3 of a rupee) in the business obtained through him. He was not bound to give any fixed time in service. The offer was indeed tempting from material point of view. Shivilal's ideas were, however, shaping differently. His fate was taking his future nearer and nearer to the forecast of Imam Saheb. He had to make a choice between a life of plenty but spent for a handful of relatives and friends, and a life of voluntary renunciation of all material comforts by adopting the whole universe as his family. To an ordinary man of the world the choice would surely be difficult. But Shivilal did not find it difficult. He chose the later alternative and rejected the offer of B. K. & Sons. He preferred to become a Jain recluse and in 1927 addressed a letter to Munishri

Nanchandraji expressing his desire to accept his spiritual guidance as his pupil. Nanchandraji was at Ahmedabad at that time and so he asked Shivilal to see him there.

As already noted above, Nanchandraji was a Saint of a different mould. His personality, his poetic attitude and his attractive oratory prevented the orthodox Jains from opposing some of his radical and reformist views. He was a complete Gandhian, was clad only in Khadi and resisted almost all obsolete social and religious practices. Traditionalist Saints would have jumped at the idea of recruiting a pupil like Shivilal. But Nanchandraji wanted to test the sincerity, honesty and spiritual growth of Shivilal before agreeing to accept his pupilship. He inquired about every necessary details and asked him to think calmly about the responsibility which he owed to his family members and others including his business commitments and to meet him next year during monsoon at Limbdi. He also asked him to get clearance from Munishri Saubhagyamalji of Rajasthan whom Shivilal had thought of accepting as his Guru.

Next year Shivilal went to Limbdi to pass time under the guidance of Shri Nanchandraji. He came in contact with Munishri Chunilalji who was at that time only a candidate to enter into the order as a pupil of Shri Nanchandraji. Both became close friends. Practice is that one who wants to enter the order of Jain Saints should take training for some time and should devote his full time in studying scriptures. The life which these persons are expected to lead before their "Diksha" is virtually the life of a hermit. Both Chunilal and Shivilal led such a life and studied scriptures. In 1928 A.D. Chunilalji was given Diksha at Limbdi when almost the whole of Limbdi and its Ruler participated with great enthusiasm. However, Shivilal was rendered alone without the company of a dear friend walking on the same path.

Seeking Permission for Diksha :

Before entering the Jain order of Saints one has to take permission of all near relatives. Lord Mahavira himself delayed his Diksha twice – once on the persuasion of his dear mother, and thereafter on the persuasion of his elder brother. True to this tradition, Shivlal had to obtain the permission of all those who were interested in him. This was surely a very difficult task involving a lot of emotions because when one enters the order, he is permanently lost to the family.

Shivlal's mother's mother Ujam Ma had reared Shivlal throughout his school days and was very fond of him. Hearing the news about Shivlal's Diksha, she had practically lost her balance and was asking every relative to persuade her "Shiva" (as she dearly called him) not to enter into the order of Saints and thus to forsake all of them. She was honestly believing that her "Shiva" had come under the spell of some evil spirit. She called Amritlal, the son of her sister from Jamnagar and asked him to dissuade Shivlal. Amritlal, however, persuaded Ujam Ma and impressed upon her that Shivlal was not under the spell of any evil spirit and that he was on the path which would bring glory to the whole family. He called Shivlal to see Ujam Ma personally. When Shivlal came to see her, both wept heartily. Other family members who resisted the idea were persuaded to permit Shivlal to go the way he wished. Shivlal's maternal uncle was another person who could not control his emotions as he had not only educated Shivlal but had seen him being settled in Bombay and Shivlal was respecting him as his elder brother. Shivlal thereafter gave a spiritual discourse at Balambha Upashraya which moved the hearts of every listeners.

Still there remained two important persons whose permission was essential. They were: 1. Maniben, the sister and 2. the lady with whom Shivlal was engaged. There was unalloyed love

between the brother and sister. In a Hindu society the existence of a brother has a very special significance to the sister and more so after father has died. When both met at the time Shivlal came to obtain her permission, Maniben could not utter her words properly but blessed him to seek the welfare of his soul. In the subsequent life she served the Saint Santbal personally for a number of years, with love and devotion.

Shivlal then went to his in-laws family to take their leave as also the leave of his fiancée with whom he was engaged. Her name was Diwali. When both met for the purpose, she could not utter a sentence and stared silently at the ground below. Shivlal reminded her of the lovely story of Nemi-Rajul. Neminath, a cousin of Lord Krishna, is considered 22nd Tirthankar (Prophet) of Jains. Story about him is that he was engaged to Rajul, a beautiful Princess of Mathura. When the marriage of both was fixed, Neminath was going in procession to bride's place for marriage ceremony. On his way he heard the cries of cattle. So he inquired about it and came to know that there was cattle pound where several cattle were herded for slaughter for his marriage feast. This large-scale violence on the occasion of his marriage greatly upset the kind heart of Neminath. Inner search and introspection started in his mind and seeing the futility of worldly affairs, he ordered his charioteer to return back even as his arrival was eagerly awaited at the place of marriage. Neminath, disgusted with the ways of the world, had decided to renounce the worldly affairs and to enter into the order of Jain Saints. When this news was received by his fiancée, the Princess Rajul, she was shocked. Initially she resented at Nemi's action but ultimately she realised the wisdom of the course adopted by her fiance and she also decided to renounce the world by taking Diksha. There is a beautiful episode which describes how she subsequently brought her brother-in-law Rathnemi, who had also taken Diksha, but who accidentally met her in a lonely cave of Mount Girnar and became

infatuated by her bewitching beauty, to proper senses, and saved him from falling a pray to his carnal desires.

Diwaliben was reminded of this story and was asked to choose the path she liked. She was assured that if she chose the path of worldly affairs she would carry his blessings as a brother. Her preference was for the worldly affairs. So Shivalal blessed her and gifted her with a Saree as a token of his brotherly love.

Diwaliben's parents and their caste leaders who were also called for the occasion also permitted Shivalal to join the saintly order.

One incident which completely reveals the inner character of Shivalal requires to be noticed at this stage. The incident is revealed by one Amritlalbhai, a childhood friend of Shivalal. As young children when both of them were playing, each one of them was insisting that his skull was stronger than the other. They wanted to test their claims and decided to hit each other's skull with a small earthen bowl and to see whose skull was strong enough to break the earthen bowl. Amritlal was elder in age and so, in fairness he gave the first chance to Shivalal to hit. Shivalal aimed the blow and hardly hit his friend's skull with an earthen bowl, but instead of bowl being broken Amritlal's skull appeared to have been broken with profuse bleeding. Shivalal was horrified at the result of his childish prank. At once some earth from a potters wheel was obtained and applied to the wound. By the passage of time Amritlal was all right and this childhood incident was forgotten by all except Shivalal. Now when Shivalal was to leave all worldly affairs he wrote to Amritlal that he wanted to see him. Amritlal had heard that the attitude of Shivalal was completely changed and that he was passing through some mental turmoil. He, therefore, thought that remembering their old friendship, Shivalal must be desirous of seeking his advise. When both the friends met, they affectionately embraced each other and

had hearty talk during the course of which Amritlal inquired as to what lead him to shun worldly affairs to take Diksha? He thought that some unhappy incident in life must have driven Shivilal to this course. But Shivilal responded by saying that he was quite happy and had successfully discharged all his worldly duties. But Amritlal was more anxious to know the reason for his unexpected visit, and hence when faced with a direct question about the purpose of his visit, Shivilal pointed to the mark of injury which was still left on the skull of Amritlal and asked for his forgiveness for the injury caused to him. Amritlal had a hearty laugh and asked him whether their friendly affection was not found sufficient for forgiveness to be sought? Both the friends enjoyed the incident which had not much significance but for the fact that it fully reveals the nobility and softness of heart which subsequently drew Shivilal to the service of the poor and oppressed in his role as "Santbal".

Shivilal also took the permission of Rajasthani Munishri Saubhagyamalji to take Diksha under Munishri Nanchandraji.

All this was reported to Shri Nanchandraji who thereafter fixed the date and time for Diksha.

Thus came to the end of a worldly life which was full of promises of material happiness. The future was to unfold the story of spiritual and social advantages hitherto unknown to Jain Sainly order.

CHAPTER 3

Diksha and Traditional Life*

The day of Diksha was fixed on Posh Shud 8th of Samvat Year 1985 which is equivalent to 1929 A. D. Mahajan of Wankaner had sent invitation for performance of Diksha ceremony at their place. In the adjoining State of Morvi there was prohibition to giving of Jain Diksha within the State boundaries. Morvi State was at that time ruled by Shri Lakhdhirsinhji. All these princely Rulers of Native States were supreme in their own States as their word was law. Lakhdhirsinhji had, however, received laudable account of the oratory style and impressiveness of the spiritual discourses of Munishri Nanchandraji. He, therefore, called the leaders of Morvi Mahajan and expressed his desire to hear the discourses of Nanchandraji. Mahajan was obviously pleased at this development and requested Nanchandraji to give his discourses at Morvi. this was done and the Ruler was spell bound hearing the silver tongued oratory and the depth of spiritual insight of Nanchandraji. There was nothing sectarian in his discourses which had universal appeal. He used to carry his audience with him with so much intensity that those who heard him did not know how two hours of his discourse passed by. People of all faiths, sects and castes including the Muslims thronged to hear him in the early hours of the day when his discourses were given.

*The facts mentioned in this chapter are taken mostly from the compilation made in Part - I of 'Santbal Smruti Granth', Vol. I.

At the end, a young man dressed in snow white Khaddar Kurta and Dhoti with bright piercing eyes, long hairs and beard and a rosary on his neck was also asked to address the gathering. He gave a short discourse which was very impressive. The Ruler inquired who he was and he came to know that his name was Shivilal and was the original resident of Tol which was within the jurisdiction of the Ruler himself. The Ruler came to know that he was to take Diksha within a few days, at a near-by place Wankaner. "Why Wankaner ?" The Ruler asked, and also expressed his desire that since the "Diskharthi" was the subject of his State, he should take his Diksha in Morvi. The Mahajan pointed out that there was prohibition to Jain Diksha in the State. The Ruler immediately cancelled the prohibition and ordered to render all possible State help for the Diksha ceremony.

The ceremony was over on the appointed day with all usual fanfare wherein all the sections of population took part. Donations for welfare activities were given liberally and the Ruler also participated actively in several functions. Shivilal was now named "Saubhagya" Muni. "Saubhagya" means bright future. This name was subsequently changed by him adopting the name "Santbal" meaning the child of Saints. We shall refer to him henceforth by that name only. Inspired by his renunciation, most of his relatives extended their co-operation to him fully even after he entered the order. One of his nieces named Vanitaben being inspired by him, took the vow not to marry and to render lifelong service to the cause of the poor and the needy.

Life after Diksha :

After he entered the order he seems to have devoted the whole of his time in study. He was encouraged in this by his Guru who took good deal of care to see that the young new recruit to the order utilises his time fully in reading, writing and thinking. Ordinary practice is that the junior-most who enters the order is

expected to serve all the seniors including the Guru. His duty is, therefore, to collect alms and do every duty not only to his Guru, but also to seniors who have earlier joined the order under the same Guru. However, Shri Nanchandraji, the Guru, was a very wise and considerate Saint who understood and appreciated the talents and trends of all his pupils. So he distributed work among his pupils in such a manner that Santbal got the maximum of opportunity to progress further and further in his intellectual and spiritual pursuits. Nanchandraji was some times saying in lighter veins that it is a question whether he (the pupil) has served his Guru or whether the Guru has served the pupil. The Guru took fatherly care of the new pupil and used to serve him with water and other needs as the pupil forgot about all the necessities of life when he remained fully engrossed in his studies. He was encouraged to express his opinions freely and frankly and he never hesitated to do so whenever he felt that truth was required to be told.

Visit to Kutch :

The first Chaturmas (four months of rainy season when a Jain Saint settles at one place and does not move from place to place as is done in the rest of the years) was spent in Morvi which is situated quite near to Kutch. Kutch District is on the border of Pakistan. It is surrounded by salty desert on its three sides and ocean on the forth. It has developed navigation and small industries. It has always occupied a very peculiar place in history. Its people are insular, simple, straightforward, frank and adventurous. Those of them who have gone outside Kutch, have established themselves in prosperity. Jains over there were agriculturists themselves. Though rustic in their speech they are warm hearted and loving. They insisted that Munishri Nanchandraji should visit their land and pass the next Chaturmas in Kutch. This was agreed upon and so Santbal had now a chance to have the hospitality of these warm-hearted people and to

respond to their religious zeal. During their stay in Kutch Santbal studied “Nyaya” and “Navya Nyaya” as well as the art to perform Avadhan from another great Saint Ratnachandrajī who is regarded as great scholar and authority on Jain scriptures. He also learnt English during his Kutch stay.

Ajmer Conference and Visit to North :

By this time some prominent Jain leaders were arranging to call an All India Conference of Sthankawasi Jains at Ajmer in Rajasthan. Here it should be made clear that the Jains have two main sects, namely, “Digambers” that is, those whose saints do not cover their body and “Shvetambaras” that is, those whose Saints cover their body with unstitched white clothes. Both these sects are idol worshippers. They have temples to worship the idols of Tirthankaras – not as “Gods” but as the liberated souls who are entitled to our respect. Idol worship is not meant to treat the marble idol as god, but as a mere symbol of all the virtues of the soul which has attained total liberation. This aspect of the worship is generally lost and all sorts of material attributes with which we are accustomed in our mundane existence are ascribed to the idol which represents the soul which is supposed to have no material wants and which is described as “Vita-Raga” (one whose attachments have vanished). One learned Gujarati gentleman named Lonka Shah was well versed in Jain scriptures. He is considered Martin Luther of Jainism. He protested against idol worship and showed that it was not sanctioned by Jain theology and gained entry in Jain sect by association with Vedic Hindus. His followers are known as Sthanakvasi Jains. “Sthanak” means a place for meditation and religious Sadhana which is known as Upashraya. It is just like a mosque of Mohamedons.

It should be noticed that though the Jains are thus divided into three sects there is no difference in their tenets and ideology of basic doctrines. The difference which exists is merely peripheral.

The idea of holding a Conference of all Sthankvasi Jains at Ajmer caught the imagination of Santbal, and though his Guru Shri Nanchandraji was not very enthusiastic about the outcome of this Conference, but having noticed the enthusiasm of his dear pupil, he agreed to attend the same.

Though the Conference was not very successful in bringing concrete results it did bring hundreds of learned Saints and Shravakas at one place from all over India, after 1500 years. Previously such conferences were held years ago at Patliputra (modern Patna in Bihar), Mathura (in U. P.) and Vallabhipur (modern Vala in Saurashtra).

The Conference, however, proved very beneficial individually to Shri Nanchandraji and our Santbalji as they had made very good impression on all concerned by their oratory and the "Avadhan" demonstration given by our Santbal for which he was awarded the title of "Bharat Ratna", meaning the "Jewel of India".

The whole Conference was greatly impressed by Gujarati Saints Munishri Nanchandraji and Ratnachandraji. Upadhyay Shri Amar Muniji, who, was very highly respected in the North not only for his lucid philosophical insight in all Indian philosophies but also for his reformist views, could appreciate the liberal approach of Shri Nanchandraji towards all Indian philosophies and strongly recommended to the Mahajan of Agra to take advantage of his sermons and presence during approaching Chaturmas.

Therefore, on a very earnest request of Agra Jains Maharaj Shri Nanchandraji agreed to go to Agra. There he delivered sermons in Hindi and Urdu and the spell-bound audience of the north was mad after him. Santbal also greatly impressed them by his "Avadhan" demonstrations. Management of "Dayal Bag", the

well disciplined and internationally known religious institution of Radha Swami Sect, invited Shri Nanchandraji to address. It is said that, this address of Shri Nanchandraji in a non-Gujarati language was one of the rarest in his life, and left a lasting impression on the audience.

Return to Ahmedabad :

On their return from Agra to Ahmedabad the Saints visited many historical places such as Ujjain, Indore, Ratlam and Ran Thambhore, It may be remembered that all the travels by Jain Saints, however long they may be, are done necessarily on bare foot irrespective of weather condition and irrespective also of many difficulties of food and shelter on the way amongst unknown people and on unknown tracks passing through forests and mountains. They could make it mainly because Indian people of whatever creed, cast or religion, have inherent respect for Saints, and Jain Saints are more appreciated because they are totally devoid of material possessions and are mentally prepared to go without food or shelter and lead a hard and disciplined life.

Soul's Power – Kisangadh Incident :

On their way back when they came to a place known as “Kisangadh” and had put up at a place near a Shiv Temple they saw a big pit dug in the ground and filled with wooden logs. Nearby were lying several cans of Ghee. One of the local Saint asked them to stay for a day more at that place to see what was to happen there. They stayed.

What they saw was that after some time, the cans of Ghee were poured over the wooden logs and fire was set. Big flames of fire immediately came out. Suddenly, from the nearby Shiva Temple, came some ladies bare-footed, bare-headed with loose long hair and carrying young children in arms entered into the burning

flames and passed through them without being hurt. It was a "Holi day" when it is customary to have big bonfires at various places to worship Goddess "Holi". The ladies ventured to pass through this fire with their children and bare-footed under the strong conviction that fire could not burn them. The priest who was chanting Mantras also tried to perform the same feat, but could not. Gurudev Nanchandraji explained the whole incident by saying that this was the actual demonstration of what power our soul had; undiluted and honest faith increases the power of soul to any extent. He said, therefore, it is rightly said "*Shraddha mayo ayam Purusha*" (श्रद्धा मयोऽयम् पुरुष) meaning "this Atman is undiluted faith".

Stay at Ahmedabad, Ghatkopar and Chinchpokali :

During their stay at Ahmedabad they stayed at Kocharab in 1934 A. D. (Samvat 1990) where they came in close touch with big persons like Ravishanker Maharaj, Kavi Shri Nanalal, Dhirajlal Tokarshi Shah whom Santbal taught how to perform Avadhans and Jain Scholar Jay Bhikhu. During this stay, GHATKOPAR Jains visited Ahmedabad to invite Gurudev Nanchandraji to have next Chaturmas of 1935 at Ghatkopar. It was agreed and so the party started for Bombay. When they reached Navsari, the Jains of Dharampur State came to know that Gurudev Nanchandraji with his party was passing by to go to Bombay. The Prince of Dharampur was fond of music. He heard about the poetic qualities and sweet voice of Gurudev and asked Jain leaders of his State to invite Gurudev and his party to visit Dharampur. As Dharampur is not on the way to Bombay, Gurudev was hesitant to accept the invitation, but had to accede to the earnest entreaties of the delegation, and the party passed seventeen days at Dharampur during which the Prince became very friendly. He daily attended the sermons and was skilfully persuaded by Gurudev to avoid hunting of innocent animals. From Dharampur the party reached Ghatkopar in time. Passed the

Chaturmas of 1935 there and decided to pass the next Chaturmas of 1936 at Chinchpokali (Bombay).

Literary Work and Observation of “Maun”

During this time Santbal wrote books titled *Sukhno Sakshatkar* (Realisation of Happiness), *Adarsh Gruhasthashram* (Ideal Household), *Manavtanu Mithu Jagat* (Sweet World of Humanitarianism). These books were mostly the compilation of the sermons given by Gurudev Munishri Nanchandraji. But this original work was a biographical account of the life of Shri Lonka Shah titled *Dharma Pran Lonka Shah*. This seems to have been written under the pseudonym of “Santbal” without the permission or knowledge of Gurudev. As already noted above Lonka Shah’s ideas were based on scriptural study and concluded against idol-worship. Santbalji had to deal with subject of idol-worship while writing Lonka Shah’s biography, but his views seem to have irritated the fundamentalist idol-worshippers. This created some embarrassment to Guruji who was trying to patch up the schism between these two factions of Jains.

By this time Santbal had developed inclination for observing total silence (Maun) for about one whole year. He asked for the permission of Gurudev for this. The later advised him that he could do so at the place where they would be staying. Santbal was, however, anxious to go to a lonely place to observe total silence for one year. Santbal himself writes that at that time he had no idea as to how his action to go to a lonely place to observe total silence would be misunderstood by orthodox Jain organisations and in the result how it would embarrass Gurudev. However, Santbal put his idea into action and selected a place called Ranapur on the banks of holy river Narmada for his lonely residence and total silence for one year. Gurudev, in order to see that his dear pupil could avail of some help during his lonely silent days, asked one of his other pupils to accompany Santbal,

but on their way Santbal secretly deserted his companion as he wanted a solitary life. Gurudev tolerated this with a saintlike equanimity; but from this point onwards nature seems to have devised different courses of action by Gurudev and his pupil with revolutionary ideas. This was the year 1936 A. D.

CHAPTER 4

Total Silence for One Year

River Narmada is one of the holiest and the loveliest of all rivers in India. She has inspired many Saints including Adi Shankeracharya and many others to perform their austerities on her banks. There is little wonder if young spiritual aspirant like Santbal was also attracted by the banks of this river like many others before him. Near the village Ranapur, on the banks of Narmada there is Ashram of Shri Madhavdasji having a cave for meditation. Santbal preferred this place for his Sadhana and alone occupied one dilapidated room. One man sometimes used to remain in attendance, but he did not speak with him also and conveyed his thoughts by writing with a chalk on a piece of a slate.

Days of Silence :

In the initial stages of total silence he lost his weight. But gradually he began to find inner peace as all connections with the outside world were lost.

Recording his own experience he has stated :

“During those days I remained very firm in my beliefs. My determination to cut off all outside connections was so strong that sometimes even people who came to see me from great distances had to wait for two/three days, though they wanted nothing more than seeing me.”

He further states :

“I had various types of experiences during this period of silence, but the most important of this was the development of my complete faith on Nature. I knew from different experiences that nature accommodates us if we accommodate it; and in cases where nature is not found accommodating us, it creates a situation which takes us further in progress. This confirmed my faith in nature.”

He further records :

“Once during evening time I was sitting alone with eyes closed. Suddenly I was surrounded by the light which I find it difficult to describe.... I do not give much weight to this experience because such experiences are not necessary in Sadhana. Nor can it be said that this was the experience of soul's realization. But this experience did convince me about the prevalence of Divine Consciousness all around us in the Universe.”

About this experience, he summarises as under :

“After this experience I clearly understood that it is wrong to presume that unity among living beings can be achieved only through outward contacts such as speech, because the subtle current of love is already encircling the whole universe. The currents of our emotions do spread out in the whole universe in a very subtle way. The subconscious world is much wider and all-embracing than the conscious world. There, what actually works is the decision which has its roots in our inner subconscious.”

He utilised his time during this period in studying all the religions of the world and in writing about the same. He also studied Shri Aurobindo's philosophy during this period.

It is this period of his life that completely revolutionized his ideas about religion, spirituality and the social role which a Saint is expected to assume in life. This proved to be a great turning point in his life which subsequently gave a great mental jerk to the traditionalists of the day.

Entering a Period of Revolution :

At the end of this period when he broke his silence in Bombay, he prepared a statement expressing his views about some traditional practices of Jain Saints. He showed this statement to Gurudev and others. All advised him not to make the statement public, but to silently practise some of the reforms which he pleaded. Gurudev was of the opinion that by making a public statement of this type he would be disturbing hornet nest and inviting unnecessary trouble. He did realise the force of the sage advice of Gurudev, but thought that if he did not put his ideas before the concerned public, it might amount to a sort of cheating. He, therefore, did come out with a statement which is referred to in details in the Introduction of this Book.

CHAPTER 5

Start of a New Life and Its Justification

Issued by Santbalji in 1937 A.D., statement after coming out of the period of total silence created shock waves in the orthodox society of Jains. This statement is not repeated here as it is referred to in details in my Introduction to this Book. Reference to it will show that most of the aspects touched therein by Santbalji were peripheral and related to external practices and not to the essence of Jain philosophy. Throughout his life he has remained a very strict and meticulous follower of Jain doctrines and his ethical approach to life and its problems was obviously more sophisticated than his critics of those days. There was, however, one part of his statement which invited a serious debate about the functional duties of spiritual leaders of the Society.

Question was and is, how you should function as an avowed Jain Saint in the Society after you enter into the saintly order. Should you be confined only to the spiritual progress of your own soul and renounce all activities which may aim at disinterested service to the afflicted humanity or should you be socially helpful by taking active interest in social welfare with no expectation of any type of personal benefit, and with a mind completely detached. Conservatives took the former view and thought that a Jain Saint having renounced all worldly affairs should not feel concerned about social problems, as taking interest in social

problems would necessarily drag him in worldly activities and this would generate fresh lot of Karmas which would bind his soul. So remain away from all worldly activities and concentrate only on the upliftment of your own soul. If you feel that some social evils should be mitigated, your duty is to give proper sermons, but beyond that it is none of your business as a Jain Saint to take more active interest. If you want to be more active, better not to enter the saintly order.

Santbalji thought differently. He said, taking of Diksha as a Jain Saint makes you a part of larger universal scheme. It is, therefore, your duty to try to shape universal scheme in such a manner that the whole social structure becomes based on ethical standards. If every part of the machinery is expected to work in harmony with all other parts of the same machine, such harmony cannot be established, if any individual part feels unconcerned about the whole. Even after renouncing worldly affairs, a Jain Saint cannot be and in fact does not avoid the world he lives in. He has to take food for his daily subsistence, cover his body to protect it from the vagaries of weather, seek some shelter in a building and accept all sorts of worldly needs from the Society he lives in. If he feels unconcerned with the trials and tribulations of this Society and suffers from unjustified inhibitions that taking active interest in social amelioration would bind him with fresh Karmas, he does not understand that only those Karmas bind the soul which are done with some motivation. Karmas done without attachment or motivation are considered as “non-action” (no Karma) which do not bind the soul, and even if they bind, the bondage is so weak that it can be removed with very little effort. This was the main thrust of Santbal’s arguments. It seems he was justified.

Justification of Santbal's Stand :

Acharang Sutra is the standard Jain Scripture which prescribes in great details how a Jain Saint should function in life. It nowhere prohibits a Jain Saint from acting for the amelioration of the Society he lives in. Jain philosophy has always given prominence to "Bhava", i.e. "intention" or "motive" in the performance of a Karma. So long as body persists, some sort of Karma is inevitable, and since the whole universe is full of Jivas (sentient objects) even the acts of breathing, drinking, moving, and eating result in violation of different types of "Jivas". If they result in violation (Himsa) and if every violent act results in a Karma no soul (Jiva) can ever hope to be free. But that is not so, because, binding nature of Karma depends upon the motivation, intention and the measure of attachment with which it is done. This is the accepted and undisputed doctrine which every Jain theologian must accept. If you once accept this position, it follows that if a Jain Saint takes active interest in social amelioration being guided by the disinterested and universal love for all souls of the universe, all his actions are "non-actions", actions without any expectation or attachment, and binding nature of such non-actions is practically nil. This is the simple logic of Jain philosophy which the critics of Santbal either did not understand or intentionally avoided its understanding. This is also what is preached by Gita.

If the work of social amelioration was foreign to a Jain monk why it was that even after obtaining "Kaivalya" (last stage of pure knowledge) Lord Mahavira, and all other Tirthankars who preceded him, moved from place to place to educate people in spiritual values, why they tried to prevent violence, untruth, stealing, accumulation of possession, sex indulgence and various other social evils? Why the 1st Tirthankar Shri Rishabhdev taught people how to build moulds, houses and cities, how to establish and organise social institutions including marriages, how

to dispose of your dead, and how to settle as an organised society. He is also said to have taught the methods of agriculture and invented an alphabet called “Brahmi”. All these activities of various Tirthankars were the activities for social amelioration.

One argument is that one can do all these things of social importance before renouncing the world, but not after renouncing the same. Any such argument is liable to be rejected summarily as totally devoid of merits. If a Shravak who remains active in the society can take active interest, of course without any attachment, and still obtain Moksha (freedom from Karmic bondage), it is difficult to understand why a saint cannot do so. “Renouncement” of worldly affairs only means renouncement of attachment to the worldly affairs. Affairs themselves do not bind you; what binds you is the attachment.

Let us look at the whole problem from another angle. How can you know that you are developing your “Charitra” (character), which is considered in Jain philosophy a third jewel in our life, unless you are constantly testing your mental reactions to the problems of life? If you renounce worldly currents of life and go to a lonely place for life, you are divorced from the life’s vicissitudes. The blessed isolation in a lonely place cannot train your mind to keep proper balance in times of distress and difficulties because these are absent in your isolation. Thus if you are isolated from the society your mind does not get any training. But the human mind always remains active and hence in absence of proper training it gets distorted. It is only when you are associated with worldly currents, that you can test and know how far you have been able to keep it detached from hate, anger, avarice and attachment of all sorts. If you are honest and sincere in achieving spiritual heights, you can train your mind in achieving not only “Dharma Dhyana” but also the process of “Shukla Dhyana”. Thus for a saint, to remain alive to world he lives in, is a good training ground for the achievement of spiritual

progress. Such a training is very much necessary even for those who enter the order because simply because you have taken Diksha, it does not mean that you have conquered or even trained your mind.

This is not to suggest that one who concentrates only on his own spiritual salvation is on the wrong path. The point is that every one has to chalk out his own method to achieve freedom. Hence if one adopts the method adopted by Santbal we cannot denounce him as done by orthodox Jains. Actually those who denounced him for the path he chose were denouncing the basic concept of Jainism which preaches Anekant and allows liberty of action because a spiritual path, according to Jainism, is not a stereotyped one. Someone asked Mahavira, "Sir, how should we move, stand, sit, speak and eat so that we may not be bound by Karmic bondage? The Lord's reply was devoid of any orthodoxy. He said:

जयं चरे जयं चिट्ठे, जयमासे जयं झजे ।
जयं भुजंतो भासन्तो पावकम्मं न बंधइ ॥

Meaning "If you move, stand, sit, sleep and eat with complete awareness, you shall not be bound by sinful actions".

Here Mahavira asks you only to remain "aware" of whatever you are doing because awareness brings discrimination and once you are able to discriminate between right and wrong you have little or no chance to fall in trap of binding Karmas. This pragmatism of Mahavira is not followed by orthodoxy because fanaticism and pragmatism are strange bed-fellows.

If you bring this type of awareness in your social actions, and can behave like the "Sthitapragna" (one whose mind and intellect are steady) of Gita, you are on right lines whether you are the man of the world or of the saintly order.

CHAPTER 6

Going Alone

The above-referred public statement resulted in his expulsion from the order. All Sthanakvasi Jain institutions were instructed to effectively boycott him by not allowing him to put up at any *Upashraya*, not offering to him any alms and not to co-operate with him in any manner. Gurudev was also pressurised to disown him which he had to do with poignant heart. Suddenly the whole atmosphere changed for him. He had a sort of devotional attachment with Gurudev and his senior colleague Munishri Chunilalji who was also known as “Chitta Muni”. He was suddenly called upon to write off all these connections. But the main question was where to go and whom to approach. One year’s solitary silence had infused in him great courage and imagination. For the next year, i.e. 1938 A.D. he decided to pass his Chaturmas in a hutment at Vaghajipura, a small village between Ahmedabad and Bavla. During this stay he had thought out how to proceed to implement his plans to serve humanity. He himself has explained how his ideas to bring about revolutionary changes based on ethics had taken shape.

He says: “In Samvat 1992 (1936 A.D.) I had written “Ethics and Socialism” as a foreword to a book on socialism. By this time *Acharang Sutra* was published. Before this I had already written *Dharma Pran Lonkashah*. From this time onwards the seeds of the necessity to bring out social revolution on ethical basis were already laid.”

“Thereafter in Samvat 1993 (1937 A.D.), I observed solitary silence. During the period it became clear how I should behave as a Jain monk from the viewpoint of revolution on ethical basis.”

Selection of Bhal-Nalkantha :

He was from the very beginning, greatly influenced by the Gandhian ideology and was convinced that no social revolution could be brought about in India without touching her villages. He, therefore, began to move in the villages round about Vaghjipura. By this time at the village Ghodasar one social worker named Dahyabhai happened to see him and invited him to move in the nearby area known as Nalkantha. This area is situated round about the coast line of a shallow water reservoir called Nal-Sarovar, and people residing there were in stark poverty. Vaghjibhai was at that time surveying this area for the purpose of primary schools and wells and was conversant with social and economic condition of the people residing there. The population of the area consisted mainly of Koli Patels who were subsisting on agriculture, which was controlled by feudal order. There were no primary schools for children, no provisions for health or medicines, no roads, no postal services and above all, a permanent shortage of drinking water. Most of the people were indebted to usurious money-lenders and oppressed by feudal lords. Kidnapping of married women was very common. As a measure of retaliation, the husband of the kidnapped woman would set fire to heaps of grass lying in open and belonging to the suspected kidnapper or his relatives. Every year 50 to 100 such heaps were burnt. People used to steal or loot sheep and goat for their meat.

Dahyabhai thought that these backward conditions could be improved only by the moral influence of a saintly person. He, therefore, requested Santbalji to move in this area. He and some

other persons including Shri Jayantibhai Shah agreed to move with him from village to village in this area.

Dahyabhai described his first meeting with Santbalji as under :

“I had no respect for a Jain Saint. However, when I saw him clad in Khaddar my first inhibition had vanished. Since Juthabhai (person to whom he was expected to submit his survey report) was also serving and respecting him. I felt more reassured. At night I found him explaining Gita. This increased my respect for him.” (p. 259 of *Smruti Granth*, Vol. I.)

When Dahyabhai requested him to move in the villages of Nalkantha, Santbal inquired from him necessary details about the people and their problems. Santbalji agreed to move with him and others in Nalkantha villages.

They had to move bare feet only on thorny foot tracks in the villages which were totally unknown, and hence they encountered untold difficulties, not only of residence, but also of food and sleep. Initially people avoided his prayer meetings and sermons. Santbal and party never missed to visit Harijan Vas attached to villages. This gave one more reason to the illiterate village people to suspect his credentials. Vithalgadh was a small principality in this area. Its Ruler was notorious for his reactionary views and feudal exploitation of his subjects. While the party was proceeding towards Vithalgadh they were required to halt at a nearby village and to pass their night there. However, they were unwelcome guests. No sooner they reached the village Gate, some villagers came armed with sticks and asked them to get out. Reason they gave was that the Ruler had prohibited the entry of Khadi-clad people, who were political agitators, in the village. The sky was cloudy and it had begun to drizzle. It was night time and they did not know where to go. One Chhotubhai who was a member of this party and who subsequently became an ardent

devotee of Santbal was, however, successful in persuading the villagers to allow only Santbal to stay overnight, (probably because he was a Saint), but rest of the party members had to go away to a nearby village. Santbal was, however, accommodated in a dilapidated place looking like a stable. In the next morning when his colleagues met him they saw parts of his body swollen due to insect bites during the night. The party then reached Vithalgadh proper at 12 noon. It was the order of the Ruler that if any Khadi-clad person entered Vithalgadh he should be arrested and put in jail. (This was because of the independence movement started by Congress, and on account of the Gandhiji's influence Congressmen were always indentified by their Khadi dress.) Pursuant to this order all the party members of Santbalji, except Santbalji himself, were put to jail. However, the Karbhari of the principality happened to be a Jain who persuaded the Ruler that those people were not political agitators. They were thereafter set free.

Santbalji found as a result of his tour in all these villages that root cause of kidnapping of married women was the heavy expenses one had to incur in marriages. After people of the area became familiar with him he called the meeting of their caste people and explained the real cause of their trouble and asked them to resolve to limit their expenditure after marriages. This was successfully done.

Nal-Sarovar Shootings :

At the village Juwal in this area, there is a big shallow lake called Nal-Sarovar where in certain seasons international birds of different hues gather. They provided shooting game to those who could afford. Santbal who had, by now organised the agriculturists of the area in a conference, called by him as "Lokpal Patel". Conference, had also persuaded them to see that this frivolous violence of shooting of innocent birds should stop.

So when a Parsee gentleman from Ahmedabad visited this place for shooting birds, some youngsters tried to stop him. The Parsee gentleman, however, took them lightly and ignored their protestation and tried to proceed further in his car. However, by this time many more village people gathered and surrounded his car with sticks and other usual instruments in their possession.

The atmosphere threatened to become violent. Shri Chhotubhai who was also at that time working as a close colleague of Santbal, in the meanwhile came to know about this incident. He, with a view to stop any untoward incident, reached the spot and pacified the crowd. The Parsee gentleman was greatly impressed by the attitude of Chhotubhai. After the atmosphere was calm, Chhotubhai explained to the gentleman the whole background of the movement and explained why and how the villagers of the round about area were organised and convinced to prevent such senseless destruction of beautiful birds only for a frivolous sport. This gentleman was so much pleased with the work undertaken by Santbal that he immediately contributed Rs.10/- and subsequently sent Rs.50/- for the reconstruction work started by Santbal.

Another incident was more interesting. Once Santbalji and his party were returning from Bavla and going towards Juwal. On their way they heard the sound of gun shots which attracted their attention. They went towards the place from where the shots were heard and found that the British Collector of the District, one Mr. Drew and his guests were sporting to shoot down the birds of the Lake.

Santbal tried to explain to the Collector his own point of view to show why the innocent birds should not be killed merely for sport. Those were the pre-independence days when even the entreaties of this type to a white British Officer of Collector's rank was considered an act of great profanation and facelessness. The arguments and counter-arguments gathered heat during the

course of which one gentleman from Santbal's party came forward and making bare his chest asked the Collector to shoot him down before shooting the innocent birds. The Collector was wild with rage and his hand holding a revolver was shaking. However, wisdom prevailed and he withdrew his revolver. But other persons of his party continued their wanton shooting. To the astonishment of all, however, the whole exercise of shooting was futile as no bird was killed. The expedition failed and the sporting party had to go back with frustration. Many villagers had gathered at the scene. They thought that the "Maharaj" (Santbal was known as such) did some miracle to save the birds. Santbalji explained that he did not know any miracle or magic and the birds escaped the shootings because, on account of the tension created on the spot, the hunters could not take proper aims. However, the simple villagefolk was not convinced of any such explanation and in the whole area the story became current that this "Maharaj" was possessed of some miraculous powers. Santbal was very unhappy because many distressed people used to come to him to seek his "miraculous" powers to get relief, and they were required to go back unaided.

However, the third incident helped Santbal to make the position clear. As now the shooting of birds at the lake was stopped, many influential persons who were habituated to this game were waiting for a proper opportunity to see that the game was resumed.

This opportunity came when the then British Governor of the Province, one Sir Rojar Lumly, was to visit Ahmedabad. They arranged for a shooting game at the lake for the Governor.

When the news spread that the Governor was to go to the lake for shooting, the whole area of all round about villages was agitated. The Mahajans of Ahmedabad, Sanand and Bombay protested and went on strike. Santbal was at Ahmedabad. Every one looked at him to prevent this senseless game. About 1500

persons from round about villages gathered to offer Satyagraha. The whole atmosphere was tense because to prevent the Governor of British days from indulging in such “sports” was considered something unthinkable.

Santbal hurriedly went to the spot. He found that if the crowd of 1500 persons who had gathered there was allowed to offer any Satyagraha to prevent the shooting, the situation would easily become violent as the Raj had arranged police Bandobast at every point to prevent people going near the lake. He, therefore, requested the Officer, who had gone to the lake for arranging the game for the Governor, to allow him to see the Governor personally before the game was started. The Officer said that he would have to take the permission of his superior, but he was sure that there would not be any problem in arranging a meeting with the Governor.

Santbalji relied upon this promise and asked the people, who had gathered to prevent the shooting, to keep calm.

Santbal waited for a meeting with the Governor. But in the meanwhile, shooting started and about 500 birds were killed. Every body was non-plussed by this treachery.

Santbal records his mistake in putting reliance upon the assurance of a bureaucrat but he also states that this incident was useful as it clearly revealed that he had no miraculous powers and he could convince people about that.

Theft of a Horse :

While moving in this area they were required to pass a night in one of the villages of Viramgam Taluka. Some Sadhus belonging to “Lalji Maharaj Sect” of Sayla, a town situated in the nearby Surendranagar District, had visited this village on horse-

back. During the night time they had tethered their horses in an open space. One Talsi Jema set his eyes on one of those horses and taking the advantage of the darkness of the night he stole away that horse and concealed it. The guest Sadhus came to know in the next morning that one of their horses was stolen. The whole village was in search of the stolen horse, but the whole day passed off without any clue. The Sadhus approached Santbalji who was camping there and requested him to help. Talsi Jema was notorious for cattle theft but he claimed that he had no knowledge in the matter. So in the evening prayer meeting Santbalji declared that so long as the missing horse was not found, he would not take any food and would not leave that village. This declaration put the villagers in a fix. They thought that the whole round about area would know about the incident and that would affect the reputation of the whole village.

Santbalji went to sleep during that night, in an open verandah. During the mid-night one man awakened him from sleep. Santbalji asked him the reason for his visit during the odd hour of the night. The stranger introduced himself as Talsi Jema and requested him not to go on fast as the missing horse would be produced next morning. The horse was not only actually produced next morning, but the Sadhus whose horse was stolen were fed by Talsi with sweets and Talsi also took a vow and assured Santbal that in future he would not indulge in cattle lifting.

Roasting of Pigeons :

Santbal party was camping in one village during this tour when they found that some youth of the village were adopting a strange method of roasting pigeons alive and eating them. Some of them would enter a well, where pigeons were found, with bundles of grass. Some others would cover the whole well with a cloth. Those who entered the well would thereafter burn the grass. The pigeons would try to fly away but could not do so, as the well

was covered. They would then be roasted alive and eaten by the boys. Santbalji called the youth and persuaded them not to kill innocent birds like this and explained how what they were doing was against the culture and ethos of our nation. The boys being greatly impressed by his sermon took vow in his presence not to indulge in such cruel acts in future.

An Encounter with Outlaws :

When people of the area came to know about this selfless services rendered by Santbalji, they began to take more and more interest in his activities. His evening sermons were very effective.

Once he was camping at the village Fangdi. He and his party were resting under a tree at about 2-00 p.m., when a group of eight to ten horsemen armed with guns and ammunition approached them. They were the outlaws of the area who were forcibly taking away the bullocks and other cattle of the villagers. This they had adopted as their regular profession. Their leader went near Santbal and bowed down to his feet. Santbalji after some formalities, tried to persuade them to leave their illegal activities of committing robberies and dacoities. Chhotubhai who was a member of Santbal party told them that if they were interested in agriculture, he would arrange for some agricultural land for them. But they said they had been indulging in those activities since many years and it was not possible for them to take to cultivation. However, while departing, the leader of the Gang promised Santbalji that his Gang would not commit any robbery or decoity in the area where he was moving for rendering social service.

In the same manner, one Bhikhubha of that area was persuaded to leave his profession of committing theft of bullocks.

During his movement in this area Santbalji persuaded many persons to leave harmful habits. People now used to listen him with great respect and were greatly morally influenced by his sermons. He thus established his presence in Nalkantha area.'

Bhal Added to the Area of Activity :

Bhal area is totally barren. But for a few shrubs one does not notice any tree or greenery in long stretches of land spread miles after miles. "Bhal" means forehead in Gujarati. Since this land is as barren and plane like our forehead, it is called "Bhal". The land is salty and is supposed to be under sea water of Gulf of Cambay several hundred years ago. It is quite adjoining the land of Nalkantha, but is at a lower level. Its main problem, even now is of great shortage of drinking water to collect which ladies of the household have to go several miles away where it is available.

Shri Amrutlal Sheth, a well-known journalist of the day, and the then Editor of the popular Gujarati daily *Janmabhumi* made the following statement on 8th March, 1946 while issuing an appeal for raising fund for "Bhal- Nalkantha Jal Sahayak Samiti". (Committee for water relief in Bhal-Nalkantha) which was established by Santbalji.

He said :

"One, who has only once visited the area of Bhal-Nalkantha, would never be able to forget it throughout his life. If any tourist happens to visit this area during summer he would be convinced how thousands of men, women, children, old persons and cattle are terribly tormented for want of drinking water. The fact is that in this area, water reservoirs are locked to prevent theft of water. In this dry and barren land which stretches for miles after miles many cattle die of thirst even while they are out in search of water and travellers are rendered unconscious while crying for water.

One pot of water costs four annas and one who sells at this rate has to walk miles together in blazing heat of summer in open land without a shade; and even after this, he gets dirty and turbid water from a stagnant pool.”

All the social and economic evils stated above regarding Nalkantha were present even in Bhal. However, Santbalji gave priority to the water problems.

Establishment of “Water Relief Committee” :

One Jivrajbhai and his family members were ardent followers of Santbalji. Jivrajbhai died of cancer and his sons were expected to spend fairly good amount after performing obsequial ceremonies. One custom which was and is still prevalent among Hindus is to arrange a feast some days after the death. Reformists have always resisted this custom. Sons of Jivrajbhai were planning to spend Rs.7,000/- in the said feast. But Santbalji could prevail upon them that the best way to perpetuate the memory of their father was to donate this amount to water relief work proposed to be started under the name of Bhal-Nalkantha Water Relief Committee which was established in 1943. The sons agreed and the name of their father Jivraj was associated with the said Committee. But, though the sum of Rs.7,000/- was not considered a paltry amount in those days, the work of the water relief was so gigantic that much more finance and Government co-operation were required. Appeals were made to the public and Government and after many tiresome efforts and arduous work put up by Santbalji and his colleagues, the Government sanctioned water pipeline scheme which was availed of by 75 villages. These efforts covered the period from 1943 to 1951. The history of the efforts would cover practically the whole of this book. But the point is that this supreme human efforts which resulted in saving the lives of hundreds of human beings and animals was made by the inspiration and efforts of one man – a Jain Saint who was

expelled by the so-called Jain leaders on the ground that his activities were not "Saintly" ! Santbalji found that the association of the name of one individual with the organisation which takes up the work of public nature of this type was hindering further collection of money, even though the objective was very laudable. Thenceforward he decided that no donation should be accepted on condition of associating the name of the donor with the said donation. This principle is still followed by "Bhal-Nalkantha Prayogik Sangh, Gundi" which is working since last about fifty years.

Consolidation of Agrarian Power :

After his Chaturmas in Vaghjipura in 1938 A.D. Santbal had also undertaken the task of consolidating and unifying the farmers of the neighbouring villages. This he could substantially achieve by organising conferences of village leaders and arranging seminars. An agreed constitution of allied villages was adopted which contained rules of individual and social behaviour. Initially this worked very well as strict observance of these rules restricted anti-social activities and provided good relief to people. About 112 villages of Nalkantha area joined the organisation. Object of these organisations was to make the villages self-sufficient in the production of grains, cloths, residence, health, education and observation of the rules of law and order. There were three basic concepts in the rules of these organisations, namely, (1) Every member should save at the rate of Rupee one per sale of every maund of grain; (2) In case of dispute between any members, there should be arbitration and not resort to Court proceedings; and (3) The activities of the organisation must remain non-political, but if any political question arises to be considered, the organisation would support only the Congress Party. This last named concept was the subject-matter of adverse criticism, but the justification was sought on the ground that it was only the Indian National Congress which has effectively struggled and led

the nation to achieve political freedom and since it had recently came to power, it should be given full opportunity to implement its ideas through Government machinery.

Similarly one conference of Bhal area villages was held at Bagodara.

In 1949 “Khedut Mandal” established by him saved hundreds of acres of land from lying fallow by supplying rice-seeds of 240 tons at the reduced price of 50 Paise (1/2 rupee) to the needy farmers of the area.

Such conferences were held for the first time in all the areas and one direct impact thereof was to inculcate the sense of unity and social responsibility among people who had developed a servile mentality under a feudal set-up. But this was not the only activity undertaken by him.

In 1944, during his Chaturmas at Sanand he established a charitable dispensary with the help of Dr. Shantibhai and Kashiben, the daughter of his close follower Chhotubhai, both of whom rendered selfless and voluntary lifelong services. This Kashiben is presently presiding over the Prayogik Sangh established by Santbalji.

Work of Social Reconstruction :

The basic concept of the constructive work started by Santbalji was to bring about social reconstruction on ethical lines. But this cannot be achieved without individual approach, removal of illiteracy and economic well being of the people. So during his Chaturmas stay at Sanand he moved from house to house and saw that meat-eating and alcoholism was significantly contained. He organised seminars and conferences for that purpose and about 2880 persons belonging to different classes and castes took

vows not to take non-vegetarian food and alcohol either for life or for a limited period to begin with.

He also made serious efforts to increase literacy and start village industries. During the period from 1948 to 1950 A.D. he saw to it that 84 village co-operatives in manufacture of Khadi and small-scale industries were established.

CHAPTER 7

Some Experiments in Social Reconstruction

Fixation of Reasonable Rates of Paddy :

The ideal for which Santbalji was striving was not merely for social reforms here and there. What he was striving for was Social “reconstruction” based on Ethical Values. In the Forward written by him under the title “Prayogni Bhumika” (the basic experiments) to the book written by his close associate Shri Navalbhai Shah on some important events in his life, under the title *Sadhuta- ni Pagdandi* (Footsteps of Saintliness), he says :-

“Today our social structure is based principally on crass materialism. It is obvious that exploitation, narrow selfishness, injustice by hyprocricy and many other anti-social activities are the inevitable fruits of the society which is based on materialism. It is, therefore, necessary that the whole social structure is reconstructed on a ethical basis so that the social virtues of justice, selflessness and insistence on truth can flourish.

“Today we are giving undue importance to material comforts of life. This may be all right for humdrums of common-place living. However, if we take into consideration many other requirements of a purposeful life, we do feel that our greatest requirement is the

development of love, truth and justice. Our human existence is merely a vehicle to achieve these objectives.

“Just as we naturally obtain grass alongwith the food crop as its by-product, we are bound to get our necessary comforts of life as a by-product of our efforts to lead our life on the basis of truth, justice and love.

“Once the leaders of the society prefer to adopt the course of truth, justice and love, even the question of centralisation and decentralisation would get solved. For this purpose, our national cultural heritage can be very useful to us. This culture and this ethical training which we have inherited should be fully utilised for reconstructing our social order.”

The ideal was indeed nice, but the question was how to put it in practice in actual day-to-day life when you are faced with questions of material importance. He had to work among the people who were not only illiterate but were totally uneducated in social norms. But he could also notice that these people were deeply religious and simple and could be easily persuaded to go with him on moral grounds even at the cost of their self-interest.

Those were the days of controls and no agriculturist could legally store more than fifty maunds of grain. The farmer could sell his produce only at the centre fixed by the Government which was at times at a distance of 10 to 12 miles from his village. Government godownkeepers were resorting to all possible malpractices. All this added to the trouble of farmers. However, these controls, which were imposed by the British Government, were lifted by the end of 1947 and the farmers were at liberty to sell their farm produce to any one at any rate which was marketable. The country was suffering from severe food shortage and grains were being imported from foreign countries. These circumstances were favourable to farm producers as they could

sell their produce at a much higher price than the controlled price which existed before.

It was under these circumstances that Santbalji proposed to the farmers that they should sell their produce only at a reasonable rate and not try to exploit the situation for their selfish ends.

This was indeed, a great psychological jolt to the people who were up-till now exploited by merchants, middlemen and Government servants in price rates as well as weights and measurements of their hard earned produce, and who had got an opportunity to make good their loss in the previous years. They advanced all sorts of businesslike arguments against the proposal and also pointed out that by way of reciprocity, they were not going to get their necessities at “reasonable” price from others.

Santbalji accepted the force of their arguments and admitted that they were rightly feeling that he was coming in their way to make some earning when they had got an opportunity to do so. He, however, pointed out that the very basis of their organisation was ethical and if they could show their social and public spirit by taking some voluntary cut in the price rates, they would be able to demonstrate to the public and the Government that they were rightly called “Fathers of the Nation”. He also pointed out that if the rates of farm produce were allowed to soar very high, the Government would also think of reimposing control. He further pointed out that if they could show public spirit by voluntarily accepting some cut in the rates of their farm produce, in future when the market price of farm produce would go down, they would have all justification to urge the Government that some support price should be fixed for the purchase of their farm produce.

He emphasised that they had got an opportunity to show to the world how an agrarian society which is based on ethical values can function successfully.

As a result of these persuasions all the leading farmers of Nalkantha met together to fix the reasonable selling price of paddy which was the main crop in this region. They fixed the rate at Rs. 10/- per maund for sale. It was also decided that the producers should sell at this rate to farmers' associations. These associations were helped to obtain finance to purchase at the above rate. The market rate was Rs. 17/- per maund. Thus the farmers suffered the loss of profit to the extent of about 100 thousand of Rupees.

However, before the whole stock of paddy was exhausted, the next monsoon approached. The monsoon was weak as it did not rain sufficiently. The market rates went still higher and touched the figure of Rs. 27/- per maund even for paddy-seeds. But this did not create any difficulty as the paddy which was still in stock could be utilised for seeds at a cheaper rate. The farmers, then realised the wisdom of Santbal's advise. Had they sold away the whole stock at the then prevailing marketing rate to get more profit of 100 thousand Rupees, they would have been required to spend much more for purchasing seeds for the next crop.

Fixation of Reasonable Rates of Wheat :

After reasonable paddy price was fixed, even the price of wheat which is the main produce of Bhal area was fixed at a conference of farmers of about 80 villages. This happened in 1984 A. D. But some farmers had stored their produce and since the next monsoon failed the market price soared high in the market. Those who had the stock of the previous year were tempted to take advantage in breach of the price fixed in 1984 A. D. But Shri Ambubhai who was the Secretary of Khedut Mandal

and a close confidant of Santbalji said that it was unethical to take advantage of the market rise in this manner. Santbalji was away in Saurashtra. So at the intervention of Shri Ravishanker Maharaj, who was the most respected and selfless public leader in Gujarat, it was decided that the farmers could sell at a rate more than Rs. 12/- per maund (which was fixed as reasonable rate) but the surplus price should be deposited with Khedut Mandal till Santbalji returned from Saurashtra and decided what to do with the surplus amount. Next year when Santbalji returned there was drought condition in the area and many relief works were started. Santbalji decided that the amount of surplus price of wheat which the farmers had deposited with Khedut Mandal should be disposed of by contributing 20 p.c. thereof in drought relief and by returning 80 p.c. to the respective farmers. The farmers willingly accepted this decision.

Such things were quite new and unknown to the farmers of this area and but for the moral influence of the Saint no farmer would have been willing to part with such golden opportunities to earn more.

Supply of Wheat-seeds to Banaskantha :

River Banas flows in the Northern District of Gujarat called Banaskantha. In the year 1957 the river Banas flooded and brought very valuable silt to her coastal area. The farmer of the costal area, with a view to take advantage of this natural gift cultivated the area for sowing wheat of which a bumper crop was expected. Those were the days when there was a severe food shortage and wheat was required to be imported from foreign countries. Sowing season had approached but scarcity of wheat seeds did not allow the farmers to carry on sowing operations. They moved the Government for the supply of seeds, but even the Government was unable to help them. Possibilities were that if

wheat could be sown in time, the produce of 15 to 20 lakhs (1500 to 2000 thousand) of maunds of wheat was expected.

Ravishanker Maharaj, the life-long social worker of Gujarat realised the gravity of the situation. This time he was the President of Bhal Nalkantha Prayogik Sangh established by Santbalji. Bhal area is famous for the production of wheat crop. So he thought of approaching Santbal for solving the seed problem of Banas farmers. When Santbalji knew from Ravishanker Maharaj that Banas farmers were on the point of loosing a bumper crop of wheat if sowing operations were not undertaken there in time, he asked his trusted lieutenant Faljibhai, who was a leading progressive farmer of Bhal area, to see what could be done in the matter. Faljibhai took up the matter and was successful in persuading Bhal farmers to supply wheat seeds to Banas farmers at controlled rates which, by itself, was a very difficult task. But another difficulty was that on account of Government restrictions foodgrains could not be moved from one place to the other. Time was running out and if sowing operations were not carried out in time, all efforts of procuring seeds would be rendered futile. Bhal farmers were knowing the importance of this factor and so on the inspiration of Santbalji they took extra care to spare 93 thousand maunds of seeds and to deliver them to Banas farmers in time by speeding up all the bureaucratic formalities of movement permits and other control rules. All this would not have been possible but for the standards of ethical values taught by Santbalji.

Resort to Arbitration Encouraged :

One of the principles accepted by the Khedut Mandal established by Santbal, was to resolve agrarian disputes by arbitration and avoid costly and long delayed Court proceedings. This principle was successfully implemented, but an impression was created in the public that Khadut Mandal was always likely

to take the sides of farmers without caring much for the injustice which might have been caused to a member belonging to the class superior land-holders called Girasdar. Any such impression was not correct because Santbalji always emphasised that the Khedut Mandal should never adopt a partisan attitude while arbitrating a dispute. An interesting incident showing how far this teaching of the Saint had gone home, is cited by Shri Faljibhai in his work *Santbalji Sathena Pachis Varsha* (25 years in the company of Santbalji).

Once the Khedut Mandal received a complaint from one Girasdar (a member of the class of superior land-holders) that to sustain his large family, the land of his own ownership was not sufficient and hence he was cultivating as a tenant the land of another person. However, an important member of Khedut Mandal managed the revenue officers and got the complainant's name cancelled as a tenant in the revenue records and also further managed to see that the name of that member of the Khedut Mandal was shown as a tenant. The importance of this change of mutation in names was that whoever was shown as a "tenant" in revenue record was to get that land as owner under the prevailing law. Thus the complainant was to lose the land by illegal machinations of an important member of Khedut Mandal. He was hesitant to approach the Khedut Mandal under the impression that the Mandal always espoused the cause of farmers and would not be able to give any relief against its own member who was influential enough. But somebody told him that his impression was not justified as the Mandal was guided by Santbalji. He approached Santbalji who asked him to put his case in writing. This was done and on preliminary inquiry it was found that there was substance in his complaint. Then both the parties were called and they were persuaded to refer the matter to arbitration of one arbitrator to be appointed by each party and a third one by the Mandal.

During the inquiry it was found that the complainant was fully justified in his complaint; but difficulty was that the person who had managed to get a change in the revenue records had paid up the original landlord the purchase price which a tenant was expected to pay under law to become the owner. There was Court litigation between the parties and the Court had passed interim order against the complainant. The complainant had grown about three thousand bundles of grass which were cut and taken away by the other party. Thus from legal point, the other party had made his case fool-proof and the complainant, whose case was just, stood to lose on all grounds.

Under these circumstances, one of the arbitrators proposed Faljibhai, who was Mandal Arbitrator, that the matter was so much complicated legally that they should leave the Arbitration and ask the parties to obtain their solution through Court. He, however, suggested that if the complainant was willing to keep half the land they would try to persuade the other side.

Faljibhai, who was fully trained in the philosophy of Santbal, disagreed and emphasised that as a representative of Khedut Mandal he would not countenance such illegal practices of tempering with revenue record.

Thus the matter was prolonged for some time but Court proceedings were going on. Finally the Arbitrator, who was reluctant to arbitrate, admitted that it was he who had advised the opposite side to manage revenue officers for the change of mutation and so he should not have agreed to act as an Arbitrator. He said he was now in a fix and, therefore, some compromise formula should be worked out.

Faljibhai, however, prevailed on moral grounds and finally the award which was given was completely in favour of the

complainant and against that lending member of the Khedut Mandal who had manoeuvred the whole thing to grab the land.

Dispute between two Families :

Another instance of successful arbitration which is noted by Shri Faljibhai in his book is as under:

Khedut Mandal had decided to try to settle any type of dispute which is reported from any of the adjoining villages. So once a gentleman from the adjoining village reported to Faljibhai that one person of his village had gone on fast at the bank of his village pond. On inquiry Faljibhai came to know that he had gone on fast as two factions of the village had a violent scuffle in the village bazaar and the whole village was tense. On further inquiry it was found that there was a long standing quarrel between two step-brothers of Rajput Community and one of the brothers had given one of his sons in adoption to their wealthy uncle, thus disturbing the right of inheritance of the other brother and his family. While this dispute about adoption was going on the elder brother, who had given his son on adoption, was murdered. On suspicion, the younger brother was prosecuted for murder but was acquitted in Court proceedings. However, those who were siding with the elder brother, who was murdered, wanted to take revenge against the younger brother, who knowing this, began to reside at another village. The village was mainly populated by Rajput Community which was divided in two factions each siding one brother. This resulted often in some skirmishes between the two factions.

Faljibhai and Ambubhai, the Secretary of Khedut Mandal, contacted both the factions and tried to persuade them, but could not succeed. Some of the elders of the village proposed that the efforts should be resumed after a few days.

Then the younger brother was called at Gundi to explore the basis of compromise. He said he was quite innocent, but was prepared to accept Khedut Mandal's arbitration in the dispute. He gave his consent in writing. So Faljibhai and Ambubhai again went to that village and tried to persuade the other side to accept arbitration. The negotiations went on for three days and ultimately when they were near some settlement, it was reported that the widow and children of the deceased were not in a mood to accept arbitration.

Again Ambubhai called the village elders and showed to them the futility of prolonging the dispute which was bound to result in further crimes in the village. After some efforts they said that some "big person" should intervene. They were impressed that there was no person bigger than Santbal and Faljibhai and Ambubhai were Santbal's men and were prepared to arbitrate.

In the evening of that day a public meeting of the village people was called. It was addressed by Faljibhai who, at the end of his persuasive speech said that if by 10 a.m. next morning nothing tangible was found, they would go on fast as a "Shuddhi Prayog". Next day village people met and reported at 12 noon that they could not arrive at a decision and that intervention of some "big person" was needed to solve their problem. Ambubhai asked them to state points of differences and appointed one of them as Sarpanch (third arbitrator whose verdict would be final). The matter was accordingly thrashed out. Ambubhai prepared the final award which was read out. Every one accepted it, and unity prevailed. The Pujari of the local Ram Mandir arranged a feast in which the whole village participated and the dispute which would have surely resulted in further blood shed and a chain of violent acts came to a happy end. All this became possible due to the moral influence of the teaching of Santbal.

Cholera at Viramgam :

Viramgam is a town situated on the border of Saurashtra and Gujarat. The population is mixed, but there are many families of Jains residing there. The whole Jain community is financially happy as elsewhere. In 1945 A. D. the whole town was overtaken by the spread of cholera. It was a man-made disaster as the people seriously lacked in public hygiene and indiscriminately threw garbage and dirt at any place in narrow streets which were full of human excreta. The town had a beautifully carved protection wall and a lake which is constructed by Minaldevi during the Solanki period of history. However, all the carvings of the wall were smeared with dirt and excreta. Even the lake was polluted and the human excreta on the banks of the lake was dissolved in rain water and mixed with the lake water. The whole area was smelling of dirt and dampness. Cholera was an inevitable result of all this.

Santbalji visited this town knowing of the necessity of relief work there. Jain Upashraya, where Jain Saints are supposed to lodge, was prohibited for his stay. So he put up at a house of private ownership. He assessed the situation and noted that the relief work started by the Government was of providing medicines and injections only. No body was doing anything to touch the root cause of the malady which was the accumulation of layers and layers of garbage and excreta in the damp soil of streets producing poisonous germs, bacteria and gas-street excreta was remaining uncovered.

Next morning people of Viramgam saw Santbal moving from place to place in the open with a bag of dry ash covering open excreta. People were amazed seeing a Jain Sadhu doing this act of public service as the Sadhus, who were nursing stereotype ideas about their duty, never thought even in their dreams that one of them would be doing such service in public. However, some

young persons of the town felt ashamed at their own failure to act. They joined Santbal and started to clear the town with spades and other useful instruments.

These young persons were organised into batches and the work of total cleansing was divided under the guidance of Santbal. The cleanliness of the town gave it quite another appearance. When the youth went to clear the streets of Jain locality, and as the layers of dirt and garbage were removed, they found in the damp under layers, a whole mass of insects and worms simmering in mud. Jains protested against their removal under the belief that these thousands of creatures would be killed and they would incur their sin. The volunteers said let the sin be their own burden. They removed all these vestigial unhygienic habits and the cholera was controlled in the town. That year even malaria was controlled.

In his evening prayers Santbal explained how meticulous Jain scriptures were in giving minute instructions for the disposal of garbage and observation of public hygiene. He said real sin was incurred in creating conditions in which insects, germs and worms were created and in not developing proper civic sense.

Santbal passed that Chaturmas at Viramgam, and his work in saving the town from the attack of cholera and subsequent malaria earned him the love of the whole population — Hindus, Muslims and Jains. When he left the town at the end of Chaturmas people arranged a big function, gave him a warm send off with tears of love. In reply he said he did not deserve any of these things and that the real credit should go to the Saints like Gandhiji from whom he had taken lessons of public service. What he was doing was merely a piece of atonement for the sin which the society had incurred in not developing proper civic sense.

Formation of Co-operatives :

Principle of Co-operative movement is based on the fundamental principle of decentralization of economic power. Gandhiji was a great exponent of decentralization of power both in politics and economy because that is the only method to restore power to people, prevent concentration of political and economic power and thereby to bring in real democracy. There was no co-operative movement worth its name during the British Rule in India. But after political freedom the popular leaders began to think more in terms of co-operative movement in India in various fields.

Agricultural sector was exploited at every stage for want of co-operative movement. Every farmer had to depend upon a middlemen for sale and purchase of his produce. He had also to depend upon usurious money-lenders for various purposes. Since he was not in direct touch with trends in the market, he was invariably cheated and exploited by vile village merchants and squeezing feudal lords. But after the independence, the situation was changing. Tiller of the land was being given occupancy rights over the land he was tilling. This improved the agriculture as the tiller was now the owner interested in improving the land. Bhag-Batai (Crop share basis), on account of which the superior landholder (feudal lord) was taking away the lion's share in the crop, was now abolished. Incentives to improve agricultural methods were in the offing. Under these circumstances, rural economy was boosting. What was required was a co-operative effort of farmers which would eliminate middleman and would ease their financial problems.

Santbalji realised this position, and so, in December, 1949 he called a big conference of farmers. About five hundred delegates attended and a co-operative society called Khedut Mandal was

established to help the farmers in getting finance and also in sale and purchase of their farm products.

Anubandh Concept :

In order to give a practical shape to his theory of restructuring the society on ethical lines which he called “Dharmanubandhi Samaj Rachana”, he developed another concept which is called “Anubandh Vichar”. This concept was not new and was developed from the culture and life style which we inherited from our forefathers.

“Anu” means atom and “Bandh” means binding force. The concept of “Anubandh” is, therefore, a concept which seeks to bind and put in harmony four principal forces of social evolution.

These four forces are : (1) The State, (2) People’s associations — voluntary or otherwise — to guide and control state administrative and legislative machinery, (3) The associations of public spiritual social leaders to give correct leadership to people’s associations, and (4) Spiritual leaders of the society, the Saints, to inspire and guide all the previously mentioned three forces.

The idea is that these four social forces which are inseparable parts of human society should be linked together as to form a harmonized and well balanced social structure of this machine of universe. Just as a machine, which is expected to give a smooth and efficient serving, should operate with all its parts in sound and harmonious condition, these four social forces should also operate harmoniously and soundly. Any imbalance between any of its parts would result in social disturbance.

Explaining the necessity of such “Anubandh” Santbalji explains :

“Truth or Dharma is the foundation-stone of the whole universal scheme. But if its “Anubandh” (connection) with its followers is not in order, the whole social order of the universe is disturbed. In other words “Anubandh” is the “Live-wire” which supplies dynamism to truth or spirituality which nourishes and protects the universal order and maintains its balance.”

He proceeds to say :

“Many Sadhakas (seekers) are found to be canvassing the idea that their concern is only to liberate their own soul. They thus remain confined to one-sided view of the liberation of their own soul. The result is that by this process they remain aloof from the process of cleansing the social structure of the prevalent evils and of infusing good elements in their stead. The result is that the harmony which would have resulted from “Anubandh” between spirituality and its seekers is disturbed.”

(Vide - page-8 of *Dharmanubandhi Vishwas Darshan* - by Santbalji' 1962.)

CHAPTER 8

Shuddhi Prayog

In chapter-7, we have seen how attempts were made to see that current problems were solved on ethical lines. These were the attempts where the organisations which were under the direct control of the Saint were inspired to look to the social good rather than the individual good.

But the larger and more important question was how the problems should be solved when the adversary and conflicting interests of the society between third parties were concerned. For this Santbalji devised the method which is known as “Shuddhi Prayog” which literally means “the cleansing process”. When you want to clean a pool of water containing dirt which is settled at the bottom, you first stir the still water which disturbs the settled dirt. Then you take out the dirty water and allow clear water to come in. The same process is adopted in human affairs, by adopting the method which is perfectly non-violent. The idea is to stir the human consciousness. It is based on the premise that there is no human being who is wholly crooked. So what you have to do is to arouse his consciousness for ethical values and social good. At the initial stage there would be resistance to protect self-interest. During such resistance all the temperamental dirt would come out. But if all this is met with scrupulous care to stick to truth, non-violence, love, understanding and patience, favourable result is bound to come.

This technic is explained in *Shudhi Prayog Ke Safal Chitra* (Successful Instances of Shuddhi Prayog) written by Shri Ambubhai Shah, a very close associate of Santbalji, who has devoted the whole of his life to the service of this cause. At p. 136 of this book he says:

“The programme and the nature of the resistance to injustice are to be determined after assessing the intensity, background, circumstances, time and place of injustice. Every type of injustice or exploitation amounts to violence. So the measure of non-violent resistance should be determined after assessing the type of violence.”

In justification of the social movement in preference to other alternative remedies he says:

“Generally speaking, four methods are available to us to redress the wrongs. One is the method to resort to violence. It is found, that if this method is adopted there is likelihood of some immediate relief. But the question does not get finally resolved by this method. On the contrary, it gets more complicated.

“Second method is to get relief through resort to legal proceedings. But this method has its own limitations. We often have experienced that legal remedies cannot reorganise the society....

“The third method is to utilise the moral power of the people. If we can organise the collective moral power of the society, we can surely lay the foundations of social revolution. But the basic requirement of social revolution is the acceptance by the society of the new values of life.... These new values can be established in the society by spiritual power.”

Then distinguishing between violent and non-violent revolution, he says :

“Every type of revolution demands sacrifice. A violent revolution is full of blood-shed and therein there is a strong tendency to suck the blood of the opponent. However, a non-violent revolution is made by sacrificing one’s own blood and sweat. Violent revolution involves means foul and fair while non-violent revolution involves sacrifice which is voluntary.” (Vide p. 139)

We shall now see by referring to certain incidents how these principles were actually put in practice.

Realisation of Co-operative Societies’ Dues :

There was a Co-operative Society for five villages. One of the functions of this Society was to give loans to farmers at the time of sowing season to enable them to purchase seeds and manure. Previously the farmers had to obtain finance for this purposes from local money-lenders and pay heavy interest. Now the co-operative society was lending money at reasonable rates. Obviously the work of the Society could not go on smoothly, if the loanees did not repay the loan or its instalments in time. For the first three years, the Society had regular recovery of the loans advanced. On the fourth year there were five defaulters, but no steps were taken against them for recovery. This gave inducement to others with the result that in the next year there were as many as thirty-five defaulters covering two villages even though the crop yield for the year was quite good. The leaders of the Society rightly felt that if this defaulting trend was not checked, one of the main objects of the Society would be frustrated.

The question was how to check it ? One way was to take legal proceedings, and it was in fact suggested by some. It was,

however, decided that the Society's leaders should go to the respective villages and put this matter before the village meeting. Such meetings were held and it was explained that the Society was not a body foreign to them because they were the members of the Society and hence they were themselves the creditors as well as the debtors, and since the farm yield for the year was good they were all able to repay the loans taken by them. Under these circumstances, it was not fair to remain in arrears.

Some villagers strongly suggested legal action, but the leaders, who were trained in Santbal-methods, ruled out legal action saying that it would increase bitterness and the co-operative spirit would be lost for ever. Others opined that if legal action was ruled out, there was no other way to realise the dues as the defaulters were not in a mood to repay saying that they had already spent the amounts in meeting other expenses.

The alternative remedy which was in the mind of Society's leaders was to adopt the method of "Shuddhi Prayog" by going on fast. This was totally unknown to the people. They did not expect the Society leaders to go on fast instead of taking legal action. Both the villages were given seven days' time to consider before the fasts were actually undertaken. On the third day village people came to the Office of the Society and reported that four defaulters were really unable to repay during the year and five others were able to repay only half the amount in arrears during the current year. Both the groups would repay the arrears next year and the village leaders would remain as surities for the said repayment. Remaining twenty-six defaulters would repay the whole amount of arrears. Society leaders verified the facts about the defaulters who were not able to repay the whole amount in arrears and accepted the proposal.

Thus a solution was found without resort to legal proceedings which would have ended in a lasting damage to the co-operative spirit.

Gambling Stopped :

As pointed out in chapter 7 above Faljibhai was one of the most trusted lieutenants of Santbal and he had digested his philosophy and methods of solving questions of public nature. He was a leading farmer and was respected not only in his own village but also in the neighbouring villages.

He found that young persons of this village were developing the habit of gambling. Elders of the village did not like this, but had no moral courage to take up the issue. Gambling resulted in other consequential vices such as theft, cheating and brawl. On Janmashtami day even those who were not otherwise gambling devoted the whole day in gambling because it was thought customary to gamble on that day.

Faljibhai was feeling unhappy at the development. He talked about this to some elders but he was countered with the arguments that even Yudhisthir of Mahabharat used to gamble; when the reason of Yudhisthir's gambling was pointed out to them, they expressed their helplessness in the matter saying that if they were not able to control their own children, how they could expect to persuade others.

On the Janmashtami day when people had gathered in large number at the temple to have Darshan of the idol of Lord Krishna, Faljibhai took the opportunity to open the topic. After stating the problem he asked the gathering whether they would go to extinguish fire if they found a house in the village being destroyed by fire. Somebody responded by saying that it would be their duty to go there to extinguish that fire. Faljibhai then

retorted that allowing the youth of the village to gamble was worse than not trying to extinguish fire because it not only spoils the moral of the new generation, but also results in disharmony in the village people. He cited an incident which occurred a few months ago in the village when a person who had lost in gambling could not pay to the winner as a result of which the winner forcibly robbed him of his bullock. It was the sowing season and with the loss of one of his bullocks the person who had lost in gambling was not in a position to cultivate his field. A serious and violent dispute was averted by the intervention of other village people. Faljibhai emphasised that such incidents were bound to increase if the evil of gambling was not stopped. He expressed his distress at the apathy showed by the village elders who bore the moral responsibility to keep proper check on the misguided village youth. People who had gathered at the temple silently heard all this, but gave no immediate response. So Faljibhai declared that he was already on fast on account of Janmashtami and would continue to remain on fast till gambling was not totally stopped in the village. So saying he left the place.

Next morning, when he was busy with his morning duties a few young men of the village approached him, and assured him that they had resolved not to gamble and requested him to give up his fasts. Faljibhai wanted such assurances from the whole village before giving up his fasts. After a while many village elders and young persons went to him to give the required assurance. He asked them to organise a supervising team for every locality to see that the gambling was totally stopped. This was done and the gambling was totally stopped in that village.

Incidents of Theft in a Village :

Santbalji was passing his Chaturmas at a village. Once a widow from a nearby village went to him weeping and complaining about a theft in her house. She was living in her

house alongwith her widowed daughter. Both the widows were maintaining themselves by doing labour work. There was no other member in the family. Her house was broken open and everything which was of some use to the widows was stolen away. This included their ornaments and some cash. The widow had gone to the police to file a complaint but no one paid any heed to help her as they were afraid of the head-strong ruffians who were supposed to have committed the theft. Some one, however, advised the widow to go to Santbal who was in the nearby village and hence she had preferred to go to him.

Hearing her story, Santbalji asked her to bring some village elders as he wanted to verify the facts. No elder of the village had courage to accompany her during the day time but some were persuaded to go to Santbal during night time only to verify the fact that there was a theft as alleged by the widow.

Santbalji then deputed one of his associates to go to that village and find out, if possible, the persons who were responsible for the theft. That man came back with the report that the whole village was so much terrified that no one was prepared even to discuss various incidents of theft and robbery committed in open daylight, and everyone was afraid of the gang of some head-strong men whom even police could not do anything.

Santbalji thought this to be a proper case to try the efficacy of his "Shuddhi Prayog" and hence advised his close associate to try Shuddhi Prayog methods for organising moral resistance against the evil elements.

One of them went to that village with his spinning wheel, found out a place in the outskirts of that village near a desolated temple, cleaned that place and began to spin cotton at the wheel and recite Bhajans and Ram Dhun. This attracted the attention of some children who gathered there out of curiosity. They were

encouraged to join the Dhuns and Bhajans. They were also told religious stories. More and more children began to collect and join the Dhuns. ("Dhuns" are the recitals of religious slogans.) The person would go away in the evening and would return next morning without taking any food in that village. After two-three days more persons were attracted. Then he gave slogans admonishing people to gether courage, to expose injustice, to help the helpless and to pray to God to give good sense to those who had strayed the path of honesty and truth. Gradually he took out processions with these slogans and moved in village streets. All this went on for about a week.

There were specific instructions of Santbal not to do or speak anything which would create hatred or animosity against the gang of rowdies.

During the course of this week the associate who was conducting the Shuddhi Prayog overheard in the village outskirts two women whispering in low tone and talking about the theft in widow's house. One of them was the wife of one of the thieves and was heard saying that her husband remained confined in the house out of fear as some outsider had been in the village to find out who were the miscreants. This talk gave the clue about their identity.

The associate, after creating, some opinion in his favour went to the persons who were suspected and told them that in their own interest, in the interest of the whole village as well as the poor widows they should come out with the true story as village people were suspecting their hands in the theft. They denied having any involvement in the matter and also threatened him that if their names were involved in the matter, he would be risking his life. The associate, however, informed them that if they were not coming out clean within three days the programme for Samaj Shuddhi would be undertaken. Nothing happened within these

three days and so the associate declared that he was undergoing fasts for Samaj Shuddhi. Some sober elements of the village thought that it was shameful for the whole village that an outsider would go on fast for improving the social conditions of their village. One villager declared that he would also join the fasts.

The story about all the events including the undertaking of fasts spread in the round about villages. So one group of sympathisers of an adjoining village came there with Ram Dhun to express sympathy for the fasting persons.

Police also could not ignore these events. Since they knew that this peaceful movement was going on under the inspiration of Santbal, they approached him to tell him that they would start investigation in the reported case of theft. However, Santbalji explained to them his theory and line of working and told them how his work would be frustrated if they interfered in the matter at that stage. The police understood and did not proceed further.

On 15th day of the movement, some of the members of the gang approached Santbal and admitted various misdeeds done by them in the past, expressed their regrets and assured him that they would not misbehave in future. They, however, told him that they were not concerned in the theft at the widow's house. Santbal admired their courage to admit their past crimes, but asked them to reveal the identity of the persons who were responsible for theft at that poor widow's house. They did not oblige.

Chaturmas of Santbal in the adjoining village was now over and hence he could move to another place. He, therefore, went to the village where the movement was still going on. After seeing the situation there, he declared that if the identity of those responsible for theft was not revealed, he himself would go on indefinite fasts. This was revealed by him in a well attended public meeting. This had an electrifying effect. He declared that

it was a part of his duty as a religious leader to see that people follow the right path. He would pray to God that those who were responsible for theft were endowed with good sense and voluntarily came forward to acknowledge.

Next day after morning prayers Santbalji's fasts started. On that day just before noon time, one person approached the Mukhi of the village and admitted that he was responsible for theft and was ready to acknowledge the same, but the stolen goods were already disposed of. The man was produced before Santbal. He admired having committed the theft and also agreed to pay compensation as fixed by Panchas because the stolen goods were already disposed of. Panchas fixed the amount of compensation which was paid to the widows and the matter came to a happy end.

The whole movement for busting the gang of the rowdies by the process of Shuddhi Prayog took seventeen days. Police investigation could have taken several months and other several months might have been taken in court proceedings, and ultimately, even if one or two persons were convicted for theft at the widow's house the whole gang of rowdies would not have been put on right tract and the village people's sense of public duties would not have been aroused. Court conviction and sentence would have left a lingering sense of animosity and frustration in the family members of the convict. All these factors reveal the efficacy of Shuddhi Prayog and futility of the legal proceedings from social points of view.

Land Allocation to Anjar Oustees:

Some time after independence, there was severe earthquake in Kutch. Houses of Anjar town were demolished. Pandit Nehru visited Anjar and assured people that new township would be

established. For this purpose about 96 Lakh Rupees (96 hundred thousands) were collected.

On the southern side of Anjar there was a large and vacant plot of land admeasuring about 200 acres where new settlement could be easily made. However, for the reasons best known to them, the authorities preferred to acquire fertile land of 96 acres on the eastern side of the Anjar which was occupied and cultivated by about 16 farmers. This land belonged to some rich merchants of Anjar who were having their residence and business outside Kutch. They could not have evicted the farmers who were cultivating the land and if acquisition was made, they would be getting sizable amounts by way of compensation. It was, therefore, suspected that these influential businessmen could manage the concerned authorities to acquire their land in preference to 200 acres on the southern side.

Acquisition proceedings started without notice to the farmers who were required to be ousted. These farmers came to know about this acquisition when proceedings for their dispossession started. The farmers, therefore, objected and made representations but did not get any redress as acquisition proceedings were already over. One farmer named Dharamshi was cultivating 22 acres of land as between himself and his five brothers. He was already dispossessed from 6 acres of land where some new construction was also raised by the new allottees. As he could not get any relief from anybody he approached one Maganbhai Soni of Kutch Prayogik Sangh. Maganbhai advised him to approach Santbalji. When Santbalji heard his story, he asked Ambubhai, the then Secretary of Gundi Khedut Mandal, to go to Anjar to ascertain the facts. Ambubhai collected necessary facts and on his report Santbalji entrusted this matter to Kutch Prayogik Sangh and Gundi Khedut Mandal with instructions to resort to Shuddhi Prayog, if necessary.

Accordingly, Faljibhai, Ambubhai, Navalbhai, Jayantibhai Shah and others went to Anjar, held public meetings, explained how the grave injustice was done to the farmers who were tilling the land and earning their livelihood and declared the start of Shuddhi Prayog which began with three days fasts. Injustice to the farmers was so obvious and the object of giving preference to the acquired land was so transparent that local population including social workers gave full support. Public media also gave strong support and publicity. The matter reached the Government circle. Shri Premjibhai, who represented Kutch, was Dy. Minister in the Govt. of Bombay at that time. He called the leaders of the movement for talks at Bombay where Santbalji was also camping for this Chaturmas.

In presence of Santbalji talks started but Premjibhai, the Deputy Minister, took the stand that deacquisition was not possible as the matter had reached a very advance stage. Faljibhai and others of the movement felt that if the Government was unable to help the farmers who were losing their only means of livelihood on account of the acquisition which was made behind their back, they would have no alternative but to lay down their lives in the process of Shuddhi Prayog, and that they were determined to do so. Premjibhai did not respond and the negotiations failed. Next day the leaders of the movement were to leave Bombay.

Next morning, before they were to leave, Premjibhai returned to them and said that he would not like to use police power against the movement, and was willing to leave the matter to the arbitration of Faljibhai and Ambubhai. He, however, asked them to bear in mind the fact that since the possession of six acres of land of Dhanjibhai was already taken away and constructions were raised thereon and since remaining 16 acres of Dhanjibhai's possession were contiguous to the town, it would be in fitness of the thing to persuade Dhanjibhai either to get full compensation

or to get some other land in exchange for the remaining 16 acres of his possession. He said if this was acceptable, other farmers would not be disturbed and new township could be completed in the remaining 16 acres of Dhanjibhai.

Option of cash compensation for Dhanjibhai was summarily rejected and search was made for alternative land in exchange. However, they could not find land of equal fertility in that area. After some more efforts such land could be located near the town Mundra. Dharamshibhai was persuaded to accept that land in exchange and the whole problem was solved, within the period of about forty-five days of Shuddhi Prayog.

Shuddhi Prayog against a Religious Institution :

Sarangpur is a place of pilgrimage as there is a Swaminarayan temple and Hanumanji's temple visited by many pilgrims. The temple possesses agricultural land, out of which about 800 Bighas were cultivated by different farmers. Though some these farmers were cultivating the temple's land from generation to generation, their names were not shown as tenants in the Government Revenue record. After the advent of popular Government land reforms were undertaken on a large scale and those cultivators whose names were recorded as tenants in the revenue record had many substantial rights such as the right of hereditary holdings, payment of revenue instead of crop share, etc. However, temple authorities did not allow the farmers to get their names recorded as tenants and took crop share instead of cash revenue. No farmer would venture to complain against the institution because if he did so, he would be evicted not only from the land of cultivation but also from the residential house allotted to him. Government Officers who were putting up as the temple guests whenever they visited the village, got royal treatment from temple authorities and hence no farmer could get any redress against excesses committed on them by temple authorities.

When the matter became intolerable they held a meeting and decided to get redress through Santbalji. Somebody had warned them that Santbal being himself a religious leader, he would not like to offend the feelings of the authorities of another religious institution. However, they thought it worth trying their luck and deputed five of their leaders to approach Santbal. They had heard that Ambubhai who was working as the Secretary of Khedut Mandal was a person of great courage and could not be influenced by anyone. They required such a person to help them as the temple authorities wielded great influence. Faljibhai and Ambubhai inquired from them whether the farmers who had sent them were firm in their stand. They said they were, but it could not be said whether all of them would remain firm throughout. These five persons who approached Faljibhai and Ambubhai, however, assured them that they themselves were prepared for the worst if Santbalji and Khedut Mandal were prepared to fight their cause.

Santbalji then sent Ambubhai to Sarangpur to assess the situation. Ambubhai met the temple authorities and others and returned with the report that the complainants were correct in their story. A written complaint was taken from farmers. The temple authorities were not prepared to recognise the farmers as tenants though they were cultivating the lands for years. It was found that there was no alternative other than resorting to Shuddhi Prayog for which a week's notice was given. Nothing happened during this week except that almost all the farmers excepting the five who had approached Khedut Mandal, were won over by temple authorities.

On 13th July, 1956 they started Shuddhi Prayog. One Nanchandbhai, a prominent worker of Khedut Mandal took the lead along with other five friends and offered three days' fast. Prayer meetings and other peaceful propagandā was also started

and nothing was said or done which would result in bad feelings between the farmers and temple authorities.

The five farmers who were firm had sown crop in their fields. So the temple authorities hired labourers and uprooted the crop. While that process of uprooting was going on, Faljibhai and Jayantibhai Shah went to the fields. The village headman called “Mukhi” and Circle Inspector were present there. So they were asked by them to prepare Panchnama evidencing the uprooting of the crop. That was done.

When the temple authorities knew about the Panchnama made in presence of Circle Inspector they realised that they were in for a criminal prosecution. So the leaders of the movement were called. Mukhi told them that Acharyashri (head of the diocese) was not happy at the uprooting of the standing crop and had given instructions to settle the dispute through arbitration. It was decided that each party should suggest the names of two Panchas (arbitrators) and the fifth arbitrator would be a person who was quite impartial. A document to that effect was prepared and signed by the parties. Nanchandbhai who had started Shuddhi Prayog was garlanded by temple representative and all were invited to take lunch at the temple kitchen. Everybody felt happy at the solution which was rather easily available.

Shuddhi Prayog party returned and reported all the facts to Santbalji. But Santbalji did not approve of the drawing of Panchnama explaining that in the process of his Shuddhi Prayog there was no scope for any proceedings of legal nature as no legal steps through executive or Court authorities of the State was ever contemplated. He said, such a process necessarily resulted in acrimony while the object of Shuddhi Prayog was to establish smooth relationship of friendship between the two contesting parties. This could happen only when mental dirt of anger and avarice was washed away.

Story went round that Panchnama was of no effect as Khedut Mandal was advised by Santbalji not to take any legal action against the temple for uprooting the standing crop.

The result was that when the representatives of Khedut Mandal went to Sarangpur to obtain the names of the two Panchas of the choice of temple authorities, the temple representatives bluntly told them that they did not want any outside interference in the management of temple properties and the farmers whose crop was uprooted could be given few chips to purchase fresh seeds for sowing purpose. This was blatant breach of promise given in writing, but since no legal action was contemplated, the representatives of Khedut Mandal held a public meeting in the village, exposed the betrayal by temple authorities and declared their intention to renew their Shuddhi Prayog.

On 23rd July 1956, again Shuddhi Prayog was started. This time it was really a testing one because the temple authorities had taken a hard stand. They began to harass the five farmers who stood firm. They could not go alone in the outskirts of the village, nor could they leave their cattle unattended. They were not allowed to give water to their cattle, at the village trough. They had to send away their cattle to their relatives at other villages.

However, all of them stood firm. In order to break the moral of the Shuddhi Prayog team, the temple authorities hired some rowdies who took out their counter-processions with sticks and other sharp-edged weapons and who began to disturb the prayer meetings of Shuddhi Prayog group. These counter-processionists were always in violent mood, used abusive slogans and adopted threatening attitude. All this was scrupulously tolerated.

Twenty-three days passed in this manner, but there was no end in sight. One person who was working as a temple spy once informed Shuddhi Prayog people that during the night to follow

the house where they had lodged would be set fire. They did not take him seriously, but at mid-night a crowd of about hundred people came there with burning torches and weapons shouting abusive slogans. That was also tolerated without resistance. After a while the crowd went away without setting fire.

During this time Shri Gulam Rasul Kureshi, who was at that time the member of legislature for that area, visited that place with Deputy Collector and began to inquire about the crop destruction and other misdeeds of temple authorities. However, the leaders of the movement told him that they were not interested in any legal proceedings and would try to solve the problem in their own peaceful way. The party which was conducting the Shuddhi Prayog was also paying attention to other social problems such as thefts, gambling and alcohol addiction.

The Shuddhi Prayog lasted for long 32 days, with peace, patience and fortitude. The counter-demonstrations stopped as there was no resistance to them. Ultimately, the Acharya of Vadtal temple, under whom Sarangpur temple was working, sent his representatives to Santbalji who explained the justified grievances of the farmers. Finally the matter was settled to the entire satisfaction of the farmers all of whom were recognised as lawful tenants. Temple authorities not only agreed to charge only lawful revenue instead of crop-share, but also agreed to pay back the excess charged by them. The terms of the compromise covered the cases of all the farmers and not merely those five who stood firm. Farmers got rights over 800 Bighas of land. This was announced at the public meeting and the whole dispute ended very amicably.

A By-product of Temple Land Dispute :

A very interesting incident which was a by-product of the above dispute took place after the above settlement. This by-product incident was the real testing ground of the nature of

Shuddhi Prayog. It so happened that one of the five farmers who stood firm upto the last got tenancy rights over 20 Bighas of land as a result of this Shuddhi Prayog. Revenue entries were accordingly made in his favour. But thereafter one agriculturist raised a dispute that 6 Bighas out of these twenty Bighas were actually cultivated by him for number of years and hence for these six Bighas his name should have been entered as a tenant. This claimant of six Bighas was the man of temple authorities and the case of the farmer, whose name was entered as the tenant of all the twenty Bighas, was that the claimant was cultivating these six Bighas only since last two years and he was allowed to do so because the temple authorities had compelled him to part with these six Bighas.

The leaders of the Shuddhi Prayog were faced with two contrary claims. They felt that if the claimant of six Bighas was cultivating since many years, then irrespective of his friendly association with temple authorities, he should get this land as a tenant. The claimant laid his claim against the farmer who stood firm during the whole movement of Shuddhi Prayog and had won his case after a great sacrifice. So the whole village was anxiously watching how the leaders of Shuddhi Prayog were solving this problem against their own man.

By this time the leaders of Shuddhi Prayog had developed good contacts with many reliable persons of the village including the labour class employed during season for field work. They made discreet inquiries from all of them and were satisfied that the claimant was cultivating these six Bighas since last many years but had sufficiently harassed the original farmer as a man of temple authorities.

The leaders of the Shuddhi Prayog tried to explore true facts from the original farmer but he did not go beyond agreeing that the claimant was cultivating the six Bighas since last four years

and not two as originally stated by him. However, the leaders were not satisfied and felt that he was suppressing the truth. So they declared that Shuddhi Prayog of three days' fast would be started to find out the truth. Fasts started. The news spread out in the whole village.

In the evening the farmer who was the original owner went to the fasting leader and confessed that the claimant was actually cultivating these six Bighas since last many years, and since he has all throughout harassed him much at the instigation of temple authorities he wanted to pay him back in the same coin. He admitted that this was his mistake and in atonement he would undergo one day's fast and would agree to release six Bighas to the claimant as a tenant.

Thus once again the efficacy and objectivity of Shuddhi Prayog was established and those who were watching the outcome of this dispute were convinced about the impartially and objectivity of Santbalji's method of reorganising the social order on ethical lines.

These instances of Shuddhi Prayog are narrated here with a view to explain the theoretical aspect of Santbalji's dream to reorganise the society on ethical values instead of material values. Shuddhi Prayog is the practical aspect of the whole concept and if it properly practised with patience, perseverance and fortitude, it not only brings results more efficiently, but also leaves no trace of rencour in the society.

CHAPTER 9

Establishment of Prayogik Sanghas

Santbal was not merely a theorist. If his theories could not be practised in day life, they had nothing more than a book value. He, therefore, established two institutions which are running till today. One is at the village Gundi situated in Dholka Taluka of Ahmedabad District at a very little distance from the Harappan site called "Lothal". (Lothal was a sea port in the days of Harappan civilization.) And the other was in Bombay. The first one is named "Bhal-Nalkantha Prayogik Sangh" and the later is named "Vishwa-Vatsalya Prayogik Sangh". The word "Prayogik" means experimental. The former is expected to conduct experiments in developing rural society while the later in developing urban society, on the lines of thinking process of social reconstruction on ethical basis, keeping normal balance between the four sections of the society in accordance with his "Anubandh" ideology, and trying to remedy the imbalances by resorting to the process of Shuddhi Prayog.

Bhal-Nalkantha Prayogik Sangh :

This institution was established in 1947 A.D. Its first President was revered Ravishanker Maharaj who presided over it up to 1956 A.D. Its second President was the well-known Gandhian leader Shri Gulamrasul Kureshi who presided over it from 1956 to 1985. From 1986 it is presided over by Kumari Kashiben,

daughter of deceased Shri Chhotubhai Mehta. Both father and daughter have devoted their life-time to the cause for which Shri Santbalji stood. Kashiben, though old, still continues as the President and guides the institution. The institution has been fortunate to have devoted Secretaries like late Parikshitlal Majmudar, above-referred late Shri Chhotubhai Mehta, and Shri Ambubhai Shah and Maganbhai Patel both of these last named two gentlemen still continue to act as the very spirit of the institution in spite of their advanced age and ill health. The institution has thus been able to obtain the services of very devoted and transparently selfless services of renounced Gandhian Workers.

Bird's Eye View of the Work Done by Gundi Institution :

Almost all the experiments mentioned above about the shaping of rural society on ethical lines and about different Shuddhi Prayog were conducted from Gundi Ashram of the institution. They are, therefore, not repeated here.

During the course of Saint Vinobaji's Bhudan movement (movement for the donation of agricultural land for landless in the villages), in the year 1953-54 this institution collected 6000 acres of land for donation.

In 1958 about 240 Cooperative Societies for cattle-breeders were enabled to get 40,000/- acres of land.

The institution tries to implement the Gandhian concept of "trusteeship" as under:-

1. The institution runs some activities of village crafts and industries. Out of the profits earned from these activities, administrative expenses are first deducted and from the net profit earned 40 p.c. is taken to "reserve".

2. Remaining 60 p.c. are distributed amongst artisans and employees.

3. One-third of the members of the Administrative Committee are taken from artisans and employees.

4. Artisans and employees are also taken to fill responsible posts as Presidents, Secretaries and Managers.

5. Certain departments are put under the sole charge and management of the employees.

The annual Budget of the institution is about Rs. 65 Lacs (6500 thousand Rupees). Village industries run by the institution have an annual turn-over of about Rs.1.5 Crores (15,000/- thousand Rupees) and the annual production is worth 12.50 lacs (1250 thousand Rupees). Employment is given to about 800 persons for whom the yearly pay bill of wages is about Rs. 30 Lacs (Rupees 3000 thousand). About seventeen different types of institutions are affiliated with this mother institution. Capital investment in lands and building is worth Rs.78,13,100/-. The institution obtains every year funds worth several Lacs of Rupees.

Following items give some idea about the constructive works undertaken by the institution up to 1994:-

(1) It has spent Rs.50 Lacs (Rs.5000 thousand) for construction of residential houses for 3000 families of weaker sections of the society in rural area.

(2) It has constructed 4000 "Sulabha" latrines by spending Rs. 80 Lacs.

(3) It has spent Rs.50 Lacs after tube-wells and village ponds.

(4) It has conducted experiments in fertilizers for wheat production.

(5) Publications about survey and research in grain production.

(6) Carried out researches in Ambar Charakha (multi-spindles spinning wheel) and card structure and use of electric power.

(7) Encouraged free labour participation by people in digging new wells and ponds.

(8) Conducted "Lok Adalats" for settlement of village disputes through "People's Courts".

(9) Hundreds of patients are freely treated in Eye camps periodically arranged at Gundi Diagonistic and Treatment camps, camps for tooth care and ear-nose-throat are often arranged.

(10) Every year hundreds of children and their families are helped under C.C.F.(Christian Children Fund — an international organisation) and are looked after for their health, education and progress in life.

(11) Gundi Ashram runs primary and middle schools with arrangements for their lodging and boarding.

(12) The Ashram runs a hospital also.

The institution runs two periodicals — a bi-weekly named *Vishwa-Vatsalaya* and a monthly called *Prayog Darshan*, and has many publications to its credit. Many of them are the works of Santbalji himself. They include his *Acharang*, *Uttaradhyayan* and *Dasha Vaikalik*, which are the commentaries on Jain Sutras and "Gita Darshan", "Ramayan", "Mahabharat", "Bhagawat" — books on Hinduism.

Some of the publications by his devotees have been award winners. They are *Santbaljini Jivan Sadhana* by Shri Dulerali Matalia, *Rat Pan Radi Padi* by Shri Navalbhai Shah, *Shuddhi Prayogna Safal Chitro* by Shri Ambubhai Shah and *Mari Abhinav Diksha* by Kum. Kashiben Mehta.

This summary gives a bare idea of the scope and amplitude of the constructive work started by the inspiration of Santbalji in the rural area of Bhal-Nal-kantha.

Vishwa-Vatsalya Prayogik Sangh :

Another institution with the same object was established in 1958 for conducting activities which would promote the ideals of reconstruction of the human society on ethics in the cities. Bombay was the first preference and hence an institution called "Vishwa-Vatsalya Prayogik Sangh" was established.

The main activity of this Sangh has been to establish "Matru Samaj" at Ghatkopar and other places in Bombay proper, giving employment to hundreds of women. It prepares articles of food from pure materials and manages the yearly business of more than Rs.50 lacs.

In 1970 this institution purchased immovable properties worth several lacs at Chinchin — a village situated on sea shore near Tarapore where Santbalji permanently settled in the last years of his life. His idea was to establish there an international institution called "Mahavirnagar International Centre" which was expected to work in four sections namely : (1) Shrimad Rajchandra Section which was supposed to give education not only on Rajchandra's views on Jainism, but also on all the religions of the world and would arrange for residential accommodation to retired persons who wanted to devote their time for spiritual advancement; (2) Mahatma Gandhi Section which was supposed to give education in Gandhian philosophy of Shuddhi Prayog, Reconstruction of rural society on ethical lines, Decentralisation of economy and Nayi Talim which means basic education on Gandhian lines; (3) Munishri Nanchandraji Section was supposed to educate fresh entrants as well as old ones in Jain order of saints not only in scriptures of all religions, but also in modern concepts of public service which could be rendered by them; (4) Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru Section was supposed to educate people in Nehru's concept on international behaviour and his political philosophy.

This idea could not take a concrete shape due to early demise of the Saint.

After his death no substantial progress is made towards the fulfilment of the objects of this institution, except holding seminars on philosophical subjects and religious gatherings. Shri Manibhai Patel, an ardent devotee of the Saint who has dedicated his whole life to the causes dear to him and Meeraben another devotee of the same type are presently taking care of this institution.

The first President of this institution was late Shri Ratilal Bahechardas Mehta followed by Sarva-Shri late Hiralal Doshi, Mansukhlal Doshi, Latitaben Shah and Maganlal Doshi who is still continuing to guide its activities.

Santbal Award Foundation :

One more institution which has come into existence after the death of Santbalji should be mentioned here. In the year 1994, the Gundi institution, namely, Bhal-Nalkantha Prayogik Sangh got the "Darshak AWARD" of Rupees one Lac for doing outstanding work in Rural development in Gujarat. Both the above-mentioned institutions, namely, Bhal-Nalkantha and Vishwa Vatsalya Prayogik Sangh thereupon declared that they would utilise this amount of Award by creating a separate Public Charitable Fund called "Vishwa Vatsalya and Santbal Award Foundation" at Ahmedabad. This foundation is actually established and registered as Public Charitable Trust. This trust has declared three Awards to be given every year as under :

(1) All India Award of Rupees one Lac for those institutions or individuals who have done outstanding work in furtherance of Gandhian ideas and Santbal philosophy.

(2) Similar award of Rupees 25,000/- for those youths under the age of 40 years who have done outstanding work in a particular field each year.

(3) Similar award of Rupees 25,000/- for ladies who have done outstanding work for Indian womanhood during the year in question.

The foundation is also expected to give encouragement also to other activities which are consistent with the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi and Santbalji.

This last named institution is of post-Santbal era but gets its sole inspiration from the ideals for which Santbalji lived and worked for.

CHAPTER 10

Some Interesting and Instructive Incidents in the Life of Santbalji

His Life Style :

Shri Manibhai Patel whom reference is already made in chapter 9 above, happened to see Santbalji in the year 1942 A. D. when he heard him addressing a public meeting on 'Manav Dharma' (Religion of humanity), he was so much impressed by his sermons that he decided within himself to devote his life to the cause pleaded by Santbalji and to move with him on foot at all places visited by him. Two years after he heard his sermons, he met Santbalji at Sanand where Santbal was passing his Chaturmans, and expressed his desire to move with him and to serve his cause. Santbal never pleaded for, or gave Diksha to, anyone in his life time, otherwise Manibhai would have willingly taken Diksha as his pupil. When he sought the permission of Santbalji to move with him, the Saint told him that he did not mind it provided he had taken the consent of his parents and was also prepared to remain pure in cases where Kamini and Kanchan (sex and gold) were concerned. Manibhai agreed. He then moved with him from place to place taking day-to-day notes of the daily events. These notes have been published in two volumes in Gujarati which shed good deal of light on how the Saint was living his daily life, solving public and individual problems of the

society and how in spite of his busy schedule he was meticulously observing all the rules which a Jain Saint is expected to observe in his daily routine.

This is what Manibhai notes in his Preface of the 1st Volume of his book, *Sadhutani Pagdandi* (published in 1993-94) (On the foot-steps of a Saint) - a title which is similar to the book previously written by another well-known follower and close associate Shri Navalbhai in 1951 A. D. Speaking about the daily functions of the Saint, Manibhai says :

“He (Santbal) was accepting ‘Bhiksha’ (food) from any person irrespective his caste or creed. He was carrying his personal effects himself and was washing his clothes himself. He always patiently heard the details about the personal problems of everybody, however small he may be in the station of life, and was giving him proper advice and solace. He was always insisting to personally respond to the correspondence received by him. He was meticulously regular in writing his articles for fortnightly *Vishwa-Vatsalya*. It was his habit to get acquainted with all the necessary details and problems of the places he visited and was always helpful in settling them. If he found it necessary, he would give necessary instructions to the Government officials and also to the Government regarding a public issue. Hundreds of people used to see him at every place, and yet if he happened to revisit a place he used to make inquiries about the people he met and the problems he dealt with during the previous visits.”

As the time passed the people and even the Government authorities used to give good weightage to his words of advice and he never minced words either in favour or in opposition to the Government policies. One may not agree with all his views about his support to the then Congress Government, but nobody doubted his honesty, love for truth and fearlessness.

In spite of all these public engagements and the time consumed in personally attending to his day-to-day personal work, he could find sufficient time for studying scriptures of all religions and writing scholarly books on them. He has written two volumes on the commentary on Gita, two volumes on Epics of Mahabharat and Ramayana and two volumes on Bhagvat. This is apart from his commentary on Jain scriptures like *Acharang*, *Dasha Vaikalik* and *Uttaradhyayan*, *Tatwartha-Sutra* and other books explaining his philosophy of reconstruction of social order on ethical basis, *Anubandh Vichar* and *Shuddhi Prayog*.

As his contemporary orthodox Jains could not appreciate his views as to how a Jain Saint should discharge his obligations to the society and insisted on the necessity to get himself and confined to the development only of his individual soul, it is worthwhile noting that none of his public and intellectual activities prevented him from rigidly following all the fundamental prescriptions prescribed by the scriptures for a Jain Saint. Those prescriptions which were moderated by him related only to formalities, and looking to the requirements of the modern age, changes made by him were only on the conservative side. His rigid insistence on truth and morality many a times looked impractical but on most of such occasions be proved right, though after covering a good deal of testing ground.

His Wide-ranging Padayatra :

Manibhai notes that from 1944 A. D. when he joined Santbal, the later passed twenty-six Chaturmas at various places during which he contacted 3476 villages and walked over 12,627 miles on foot, and apart from the whole of Gujarat, visited many States such as Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Delhi, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, U. P., Orissa, Bihar and Bengal to spread his message.

Strict Adherence to Rules during Padyatra :

Meeraben is the lady who moved with the Saint on foot along with Manibhai Patel from place to place covering great distances among unknown people. She has recorded her experience in a small booklet titled *Santbal — Mari Ma* (Santbal — my mother) in Gujarati. Following account shows how meticulous the Saint was in observing the rules prescribed by the scriptures for a Jain Muni, even in the most adverse circumstances.

Santbalji, Meeraben and Manibhai were moving towards Calcutta. They were approaching a village fixed for their stay. They had covered about twelve miles on foot in burning hot summer. The place and people were unknown. At a little distance from that village they noticed a small “hotel” and opposite to it was a dilapidated Dharmashala. The party decided to put up at that Dharmashala. But no human being was visible in the round-about area. For making further arrangement of water and food, Manibhai went to the village, took a round but could not notice any person. On his return they were at a loss to understand how the problem of “hot” water for the Saint could be solved. As a strict adherent of the practice, which a Jain Saint is expected to follow, Santbal did not take water, either for drinking or for washing his clothes, which was not once boiled, and which was not made “Achet” (not containing germs).

Such problems were not new for them when they moved in strange places and unknown people, but nature always provided some solutions. This time Manibhai borrowed one utensil from the “hotel” and boiled in it some water for the Saint. Next problem was to get food. All the members of the party, including Santbalji, had made a rule not to accept food from those who were not vegetarian and were alcoholic. But as you go east, this becomes very difficult because, there, fish-eating is considered vegetarian. By and large the people in the Indian rural area are

hospitable, and would very willingly feed Sadhu and Sannyasis. But to get a vegetarian family was very difficult. After some time, one man went to them, as if sent by God, and asked whether the Saint would accept food from him as he was a complete vegetarian. Manibhai and the Saint went to his hutment. He was a very poor man and gave some dried up pieces of loaf. The Saint soaked them in water and consumed. But what about the other two ? Saint realised the situation and took Manibhai again to the house of the poor man who was rich in heart. A dried up loaf was given to Manibhai who also could consume the same after soaking it in water. Meeraben was on Ekadashi fast and so she could not take even dry loaf soaked in water. The hotel-owner came to know this. So he offered a cup of milk and a "Til-Chiki" (preparation of sesamum in Gur).

All of them were half-staved and exhausted on account of journey under extreme heat – everyone carrying his or her own belonging.

After covering some miles for the next destination they noticed a hut. Seeing them approaching that hut, a gentleman clad in khaddar came out to receive them. He said he was a Sarvodaya worker and would be glad to receive them in his hut. He gave some ration and materials for cooking which was done by Meeraben and Manibhai. However, like a true Jain Muni, Santbal always preferred not to take Bhiksha only from one person unless circumstances forced him to do so. He, therefore, inquired from his host whether any other vegetarian family was available. The kind host took him to the village proper which was at a great distance. Though they were all completely exhausted, the Saint preferred to cover the distance to the village in burning heat and obtained for him a part of Bhiksha from a different family. During this journey the Saint took food only once a day for most of the days. Even when he got a vegetarian family, the food was many a times mixed with potatoes, onions or garlic — which

having their growth underground — are prohibited for a devout Jain.

The party was thus proceeding to Calcutta where the Saint was invited to pass his Chaturmas at Bhavanipura by one Shri Damani, who was the head of the Jain Organisation there. When Damani knew about the difficulties of food and water encountered by the Saint and his party on their way, he arranged for a cook and a cart with necessary ration to accompany the party on their way to Calcutta, and sent an advance information about the same to the Saint. The Saint thanked Shri Damani and the Jain Organisation for the kind gesture but politely rejected the arrangement saying that all such difficulties were contemplated by him when he entered the Saintly order. However, those who brought the offer were not convinced. So they gave to Manibhai a cash amount of Rs. 200/- for making purchases when necessary on their way. With a view not to offend their feelings, Manibhai accepted the amount but did not spend a pie and returned the whole amount back to the hosts after reaching Calcutta.

In times of the difficulties narrated above Santbalji used to say that if we could repose complete faith in Providence, Nature takes care of our needs.

There is nothing extraordinary for a Jain Saint to undergo the experiences of the type mentioned above, whenever they are on move from one place to another. These events are, however, mentioned here only to show that the person who was hooted out of the community of Jain Saints only because he wanted some marginal adjustments to the traditional way of life for serving humanity in a better way, was observing all fundamental restrictions prescribed by scriptures, rather more scrupulously and rigidly than his orthodox detractors living in ease and comforts of the traditional life.

SOME INCIDENTS OF NOTE

Ahmedabad Riots :

During violent Hindu-Muslim riots in Ahmedabad in 1946 he fearlessly worked in Muslim localities when many a times he heard some bad characters proposing to do away with a “Hindu Bawa” moving in that manner in their locality. He notes that some time he was afraid that the threat was real but he had enough courage and trust in the force of love which compelled him to move in that manner. Once he was asked a question as to what a person believing in non-violence should do when everybody is found running away to save his life during violent rioting ? His reply was that the step taken by the Government to quell riots would necessarily be violent. Such steps may seem to be temporarily establishing calm but they would not change the hearts of people who indulge in violence. The only way to contain riots is to try to stop rumour-mongering and to create an atmosphere of fearlessness by moving in the affected area to restore peace. In so doing sometimes one has to put his life in danger but that risk has to be taken. Some times you get fruit of your action during your life and some times after your life. One who is truly non-violent cares only for his principles.

Waving of Lamp :

Manubhai Pandit is a known literary figure in Gujarati literature. He is an ardent devotee of Santbalji and has written several booklets explaining several aspects of the life and philosophy of Santbal. One such book bears the title *Sant Param Hitakari* (A Beneficent Saint). It contains some very significant events in the life of Santbal. Here we shall touch a few of them.

In the year 1950 A.D. Santbal was passing his Chaturmas at the village Koth. It was an early morning of the Hindu New Year

Day of Samvat Year 2006 when Santbalji was meditating on his coach. Being a New Year Day, fireworks were being played even in early hours of the day and people were engaged in offering prayers. By this time one old lady came with an 'Arti' (lamp with several wicks for waving before the idol of God during worship) and lit the five wicks soaked with Ghee. She began to sing a song in worship of Santbal as her god and asked Santbal to come out to enable her to worship him properly. When Santbal saw her, he asked her to put the lamp of worship aside and to enter the room where he was meditating. When she did it the Saint told her that worship-lamp should be waved before gods and not before human beings like him. She, however, insisted and told him that she had not seen gods, but he was her god because the day she had not brought her sick son to get his blessings, the son began to regain his health. The Saint explained to the innocent lady that her son regained his health only in the ordinary course and he had done nothing except praying for his health. The lady, however, remained unconvinced and was rather dejected as in the morning of the New Year Day the first thing she wanted to do was to offer her worship to the person whom she thought to be possessing Divine powers.

Manubhai was present when this incident took place. He felt for the dejection caused to the old lady on the New Year Day and drew the attention of the Saint that the New Year Day of the innocent rustic lady was spoiled by his refusal to accept 'Arti' from her.

Santbalji explained how dangerous it was to encourage people of our country to indulge in hero-worship. He pointed out that the duty of all public workers was to see that the common man learned to appreciate virtues and not the person who held these virtues and if the innocent and illiterate people of the rural area like Bhal were encouraged to believe in miracles, they would be lead to form a new sect, which he never wished to happen.

Anger is Fire :

It was in the year 1952 when popular elections on the basis of adult franchise first took place. Shri Gulam Rasul Kureshi, a nationalist Muslim and a very close associate of Gandhiji was contesting Dhandhuka Constituency as a candidate of Indian National Congress. Those were the days when Santbalji was supporting Congress in all popular elections. There were people who did not approve of a Saint thus taking interest in politics. But Santbal honestly believed that it was in the interest of the nation to accord full support to the Congress which wanted to implement the policies for which it had fought the imperialist power.

In one of these election meetings after his lecture was over, a few young persons asked him to take out his saintly dress if he was so much in love for the Congress. Other persons also joined in this demand and the atmosphere became tense, as there was a chorus of cries for change of his saintly clothes. This momentarily upset Santbal, who never lost his balance on such occasions. He retorted asking his hecklers first to understand what the clothes he had put on meant for, and then ask him to take them out. Soon he regained his balance and peacefully continued his talk.

At midnight during the night which followed Manubhai saw that instead of sleeping, Santbalji was meditating in the sitting posture and he continued meditating till late hours of the night.

In the next morning Manubhai asked the Saint why he was not sleeping during the night as usual. Santbalji explained that he had retorted the hecklers in anger and whatever was said in anger never carried conviction. So in atonement he was doing "Pratikraman" (A Spiritual process of looking back, and resolving not to commit the acts which were detrimental to soul's progress). He explained that anger is fire which takes no time in burning but takes much time in extinguishing.

Next morning the youths who had heckled him went to him, regretted for their attitude and asked to be forgiven. The Saint assured them that they were already forgiven on the spot.

A Defamatory Pamphlet :

In 1956 Santbal was passing his Chaturmas in Dholka. At that time Gujarat was a part of the bilingual State of Bombay and hence the popular movement for the creation of Maha Gujarat was vigorously going on. Santbalji was propagating the view in favour of a bilingual State. As usually happens during such movements, feelings were running high and tolerance for the opposite view was the casualty.

During this time some body issued a pamphlet highly defamatory of Santbalji in dirty language. One pedlar on the railway station was distributing this pamphlet shouting the defamatory banner lines as a train arrived at the station. A group of passengers called the pedlar and purchased the pamphlet. The pedlar sold a copy to them and again started to hawk by shouting the defamatory words. The passengers knew who Santbal was and so hearing the defamatory words being shouted in that manner, one of them became angry and thrashed the pedlar who fell down on the platform. The train immediately started. One of the persons who witnessed this incident, and who had also purchased the pamphlet, narrated this incident and showed the pamphlet to the party of Santbal who was camping there for Chaturmas. All the persons who read the pamphlet were agitated. They showed it to Santbal and narrated the incident of the Railway Station. Santbal smiled but did not utter anything and since it was evening time to offer prayer he finished his "Pratikraman". Thereafter he called Manubhai and asked him to write a letter to the people of his Ashram at Gundi advising them not to get agitated if they came across the pamphlet and to see that nobody caused any injury to the pedlar who distributed it.

After a while when the prayers were over Manubhai inquired from Santbalji what was wrong if such scurrilous and obscenely abusive pamphlets were prevented from being circulated. Santbal's reply was that the propagation of lies never sustained for long and that it was not proper to punish the pedlar as was done at the Railway Platform because the pedlar was not interested in defaming him; his interest was confined only to the sale which was to bring income to him. The matter ended there.

Blessings to Kalu :

It was the conclusion of an evening prayer meeting when it was already 10.00 p.m. of the winter night. Outside, cold wind was blowing and all those who had gathered to offer prayer were dispersing for night rest. By this time a man came running and gasping for breath. Addressing the Saint he implored him to go with him. The followers who were present asked him to say whatever he wanted to, then and there, instead of asking the Saint to go with him out in the winter night, and reminded him that nothing was secret with the Saint. The stranger retorted saying that nothing was secret with the Saint as he was god-like but other were humans and would like to talk to him in secret.

The Saint looked to his watch and asked the stranger to go ahead and followed him. Both silently went to the village outskirts on the bank of a pond where a group of people was sitting surrounding a bonfire. Seeing the Saint approaching them they were overjoyed, went forward to receive him and bowed down to his feet. Going near the bonfire the Saint asked them in a tone full of sympathy and affection why he was required. Some body from the crowd shouted, "Maharaj, bless this wretch". Before the Saint made further inquiries, another person said, "Maharaj, we have brought this Kalu, please bless him." The Saint thought that the matter was not so simple because if it was a mere matter of blessing some one, they would not have called him personally at

an odd hour of a winter night. He asked them to tell the whole story. They revealed that Kalu who was to be blessed was the son of Oghad who was a hardened criminal of that place and who had recently died after coming out of Jail. However, Kalu was promising to be a greater danger and had taken away the bullocks of the village Mukhi who was so strong and influential that if the bullocks were not returned their whole community would be put to peril. They, therefore, thought that Kalu would mend his ways if he was blessed by a saintly person like Santbalji. Santbalji put a glance at Kalu who out of shame looked down on earth. Santbal said the young man was brilliant and perhaps wanted to take to land cultivation with the stolen bullocks. Kalu then looked up and told the Saint that he had no intention to steal or keep the bullocks; he had taken them away with a view to challenge the high-handed manner in which the Mukhi was behaving with everybody ever since he had got a gun with him. He pointed out that a few days ago, Gopa's cow had strayed towards the field of the Mukhi who threatened that he would shoot down anyone who allowed his cattle to stray in his field. He (Kalu), therefore, thought it proper to accept his challenge and took away his bullocks to test the fire power of his gun. Santbal smiled and sweetly told him that it was all right and that since he had already tested the strength with success, he should not only return the bullocks to the Mukhi but should also change his ways and take to agriculture. So saying, in a gesture of blessing Kalu, he put his hand on his head and asked him to return Mukhi's bullocks. Everybody got up, bowed down to Santbal and Kalu went along with his friends to return the bullocks to the Mukhi.

Sale of Jaggery Used for Brewery :

While, Santbal was on tour of Surat District in 1958 he was very warmly received by people at Madhi. Jugatrambhai, one of the most dedicated and respected Gandhian worker of Gujarat, was one of them. He was the President of Gujarat Nashabandhi

Mandal. (Association for Prohibition of Alcoholic drinks). He was very anxious to see that the members of the Scheduled Tribes (Adivasis) were made free from addiction of alcohol. But this was not possible so long as old jaggery which was widely used for distillation in breweries was available in plenty. So he talked about this problem to Santbalji when he visited Madhi and emphasised that the sale of old jaggery should be stopped in the area.

After the evening prayers were over, it was customary for Santbal to give a small discourse on the current social problems. His prayer meeting at Madhi was very well attended and during the discourse which followed, Santbalji thanked the citizens for the warm welcome given to him. But he also said that he was expecting something more from them. So saying, he talked about the evils generated by alcohol addiction and the necessity to fight against alcoholism. After stating this effectively he pointed out how the sale of old dirty smelling jaggery which was unfit for human consumption was being sold in the area for the purpose of distillation and how those who were dealing in the trade of such jaggery were helping liquor intoxication. He said he was begging "Bhiksha" of quite a different type from them to prevent them from trading in unconsumable jaggery.

This appeal had good effect on the audience. One merchant got up and said that he was taking vow not to sell jaggery which was used for distillation. Rest of the audience welcomed this by resounding clappings of hands. Soon other merchants followed. One Parsee gentleman who was doing the business of transport of such jaggery took vow not to transport the same. One merchant who was selling liquor actually manufactured from jaggery stood up and vowed not to trade in it. This changed the whole atmosphere. Jugatrambhai was overjoyed.

Santbalji thereafter moved in Surat District, at many places such as, Vyara, Navapur, Chinchpada, Khatgaon, Khandbara, Raigad and Khapar. Every where he made similar appeals and got very good response.

A reference is made above to the two volumes written by Manibhai Patel about the daily notes taken by him during the course of the Saint's journey from place to place. Following events which are very significant in knowing Santbal's personality and views are taken from these notes.

Fight against Untouchability :

Santbalji never missed to visit Harijan Vas of every village which he visited and always emphasised that casteism and untouchability are the vices from which Indian Society should be free. In 1947 when he visited village Unava he went for "Gochari" (receiving food offerings) to Harijan Vas and accepted food from Harijan families. His only limitation in accepting food was that the person offering food should be completely vegetarian and non-alcoholic. If these two conditions were fulfilled there was no objection on the ground of caste, creed or religion. The Harijan families from whom he received Bhiksha at Unava were fulfilling these conditions. But when the village people knew that the Saint had taken Bhiksha from Harijans they were greatly agitated and could not stomach his ideas.

From Unava Santbal and party went to village Saradhav. There the villagers has declared boycott of Harijans. The moment the party entered this village, people began to inquire whether they had gone there in support of the movment against untouchability. So when in the prayer meeting of the evening Santbalji began to address against untouchability, there was commotion in the meeting and some body shouted saying that if the Saint was to speak against untouchability he should better go

to Dhedh Vas (separate residential area for untouchables). Another shouted saying that if he wanted to explain Sanatan Dharma he should first become a Sanatani Sadhu. Undaunted by these interruptions and yellings, he explained that they were not at fault in adopting such an attitude because the real fault was of their religious teachers who had given wrong tuitions to them. He said, he would, however, not hesitate to speak the truth. He also explained that Jainism was not secterian and he did not represent any particular religion.

He was addressing the prayer meeting sitting on a bench lent by one of the villagers. The owner of the bench felt embarrassed seeing the mood of the crowd. So he asked the Saint to vacate his bench. Immediately the Saint did so and completed his address standing.

At another place (Kesardi), village people did not accommodate him and his party of students, a few of them were Harijans. So he camped under the shade of a tree in the outskirts of the village and conducted his classes.

In this manner he encountered resistance of the orthodox village society at various places, but nothing daunted him from carrying out his mission.

Nahan Pagi :

Saintliness radiates, and it radiates very powerfully. That is why Saints some times radically affect the lives of some people even without coming into their personal contact. Nahan Pagi's life took turn in this manner. "Pagi" is the name of a profession. "Paga" means foot. They are called "Pagis" because they are hereditarily trained in Crime investigation by identifying footsteps of criminals. Their investigation was remarkably accurate, and was conducted on the lines of Sherlock Homes. In village their

services were engaged as watchmen but some who could not get employment took to thefts and cattle lifting which was taken as a profession by their community. They had their own rules and regulations for conducting this "profession" and they were strictly observed. Nahan Pagi was a very head-strong man belonging to this "profession". He was a notorious decoit, a hunter, a thief and a known alcoholic. People were afraid of him and his companion Popat Pagi.

In the year 1948 Santbal was once camping at Limbdi a town in Saurashtra. After the evening prayer meeting, two tall and robust young men armed with swords got up while the meeting had not still dispersed. They attracted the attention of all. Both of them went near the Saint and in a voice choked with emotion Nahan said with folded hands "Maharaj, we are tormented by our own sins. Give us a vow not to commit these sins again. We were in search of a true Saint before whom we could acknowledge our misdeeds. Now bless us that we could renounce our present life." All those who were present in the meeting and knew the credentials of these two, were stunned. Santbalji himself was surprised at this sudden development.

He asked them how they knew him. "Know you" ? Nahan said, "Who does not know you ? Do we not know that for our benefit you are moving bare feet in the blazing heat of the summer in our area. We came to know that you were camping at Limbdi and were likely to leave tomorrow. We, therefore, came running so as not to miss you."

The Saint blessed them saying that only those who are brave can bravely switch over to the path of religion. "Uptil now," he said, "you have used your courage and bravery in accomplishing your decoities and other misdeeds. Now you utilise these activities for the protection of the society and be true human beings." He then offered prayers for peace. Nahan and his companion again

bowed down to the feet of the saint. Nahan said, "Maharaj, from now onwards we belong to you and please call me whenever I am found useful because, I am fully conversant with the looting process going on in Bhal-Nalkantha and am knowing each and every culprit involved in these crimes."

Nahan was very useful in investigating some notorious crimes where police had failed. A very interesting account of how he was useful in unearthing these crimes is found in Faljibhai's book, *Twenty-five Years with Santbal* to which reference is already made above.

A Chaturmas with a Difference :

It was the year 1948 when about a month before the usual Chaturmas Santbalji visited Rajkot, a big town in Saurashtra. A big public meeting of Rajkot citizens was held to welcome him and to request him to pass his Chaturmas at Rajkot. All the leaders of Jain community at Rajkot insisted for it and assured all co-operation. They also moved with Santbalji for the selection of the place for his stay during Chaturmas. Only such a place was required which could accommodate also a big public meeting: One such place, which was known as Mahajan Dela, and which was situated in the middle of the town, was selected.

Santbal and his party thereafter left Rajkot to return there for Chaturmas after a month. When the Saint and his party returned after a month, they were received only by a handful of persons which was significantly in contrast with the reception accorded only a month ago. It was apparent that something had gone wrong. When they found that the place for their stay was also changed as instead of the Mahajan Dela which was chosen previously a private house having a small back-yard was fixed. On inquiry it was found that Mahajan Dela was not available as two Jain nuns were to stay there for Chaturmas. It appeared that

some orthodox managers of the property were against giving this Dela for Santbal. Santbalji had no objection to stay at any place, but the organisers of his visit were anxious to see that a big place which could accommodate a meeting of thousands of people was available. The Government was in possession of several such places and the Chief Minister and other ministers were ready to offer one of such places for Chaturmas of the Saint, but the later was not willing to accept any Government accommodation.

It was found that some portion of Mahajan Dela was given to a party on lease, and that party was willing to give the portion of his possession for use in Chaturmas. Santbal agreed to go there provided the landlord Mahajan agreed. That was agreed upon and it was decided that the Saint should stay there for Chaturmas.

Since the nuns were already camping for Chaturmas in the other portion of Mahajan Dela, Santbal went to them for their Darshan and arranged that they should first give their sermons and his own sermons would follow theirs. This was a unique type of gesture as it was customary with the male dominated society that as between male and female Saints it is the former who would take priority in every thing including giving of sermons. The Saint never believed in such irrational discrimination. His gesture created a very good impression.

As the days passed on, the attendance in the Saint's sermons was day-to-day increasing and the space in the leased portion occupied by him was found to be very short. So loudspeakers were required to be arranged in the space outside the Dela. This was something which orthodox Jains would not have liked as being against their out-dated notions.

It was usual practice with Santbal to have prayer meetings at night and to address the gathering at the end of the prayers. These night meetings attracted more attention especially of the ladies as

they could become totally free from their household duties only at night. The meeting also began to be larger day-by-day. It was monsoon and on rainy days it became difficult to accommodate the audience. Next portion of Dela could accommodate all even during rains but that portion was not made available for night meeting on account of a few fundamentalists who objected to the night attendance of ladies. Santbal tried to explain with the aid of scriptures that there was nothing wrong in night meetings and the ladies attending the same but it was of no avail. There were in all 18 members of the Managing Committee for the Dela. Out of them 14 were in favour of sparing the Dela for night meeting and also for allowing ladies to attend the same. Only 4 persons were against. Youth insisted that the majority view must be carried out. However, Santbal took the stand that so long as even a single member objected, he would not give his sermons in that portion of the Dela during night time. However, the ladies were firm in their resolve. They organised themselves and eighty-five of them were prepared to go on fast till the remaining portion of the Dela was spared for night meetings. This was all subject to the approval of the Saint. When the ladies met him for his approval, he explained to them that the course which they wanted to adopt was not in larger interest of the community because the ill-will created in the minds of some, however, wrong it might be, would linger on even after he left the place at the end of the Chaturmas. He also explained that it would not matter if he dropped his night sermons as the two nuns were already there for the whole Chaturmas.

The ladies refrained from going on fasts but the young persons of the community felt that it would be wrong if the whole Chaturmas went on without night sermons of the Saint. They, therefore, mobilised support and called a larger meeting of the Jains and non-Jains and resolved to collect funds and to find out a larger space elsewhere. This they could do at the compound of

“Sanghrajka House” where a large tent was erected with loudspeakers and electric connections. All meetings were well organised. As usual donations were declared during Paryushan holidays but these donations were for Harijan amelioration and instead of usual distribution of sweets, booklets containing spiritual knowledge were distributed. Thus the whole Paryushan festival was celebrated in a different fashion.

*The whole incident clearly reveals the method of approach adopted by the Saint to solve controversial social problems on ethical lines.

CHAPTER 11

Last Phase

All the incidents noted in the previous chapter give a clue to the life style and philosophy of the Saint. Like a true Jain Saint he used to move from village to village and from town to town except for the four months of Chaturmas during monsoon. *Santbal Smruti Granth* Volume - 2 gives year to year and day-to-day account of his movements right from the year 1929 when he took Diksha upto the year 1982 when he left his physical frame and started on the pilgrimage of eternity. From 1963 to 1966 he moved out of Gujarat at Delhi, Calcutta and Bhilai and in 1967 he returned to Gujarat via Nagpur, Sevagram, Wardha, Pune, Akola, Fatepur and Nandabar.

In 1968 he passed his Chaturmas for the first time at Chinchani. On 1st December 1968 he noted :

“I had taken Diksha on Posh Shud 8th. I would be completing forty years of my Diksha on Posh Shud 8th of this Samvat Year 2025. During this period I have covered thousands of miles throughout the country. Considering all these facts, I do not find there is anything objectionable if I select any place for my permanent stay.”

It appears that his association with Bombay devotees prevailed. Though he had selected Gundi, a small village near Ahmedabad, as his Prayog Bhumi — a place to carry out his

experiments in the reorganisation of the society on ethical lines, he was somehow persuaded to select sea coast in the South of Gujarat, far away from Gundi. Chinchani, a small township in District Thana and situated on sea shore, was selected. Prayogik Sangh, Bombay purchased a *vadi* with residential accommodation and having many fruit trees, wells and compound wall. And from 1970 A. D. onwards the Saint made it his permanent residence from where he conducted all his activities till his death in 1982 A. D. at Bombay.

At Chinchani, many prominent persons of every field — spiritual, cultural, social, literary and political — used to see him and he took equal interest in all these activities.

Though his attachment to the Indian National Congress continued, he was very unhappy with its functioning and its straying away from Gandhian ideals. On 7th January 1972 a meeting of Prayogik Sangh was called and it was decided to form a “Gram Congress” a separate congress which would devote its activities on Gandhian lines. He also called “Sant Sevak Samudyam Parishad” which was attended by some prominent politicians, social workers and saints who were inspired by Gandhian values. All this was in an attempt to revitalise the Gandhian concept and to improve the day-to-day deteriorating values in Congress politics. Indian Emergency came in 1975-1976 with all its evils. The Saint must have been internally unhappy as it was obviously against his own noble ideals of ethical social values and their balancing factor of Anubandh. He made an attempt to meet Indira. But that did not fructify. However, he did not come out openly against emergency as was also done by another revered great Saint Vinobaji. His unhappiness at the Congress working becomes evident from a note made for the year 1976 in the Volume - II of the above referred *Smruti Granth*.

It says :

“16-3-1976. Three days’ fasting prayer as the Congress was found giving encouragement to deserters of other parties.”

It appears from these notes that as the time passed he became completely a-political and concentrated more on the work of organising Sant Sevak Samudyam Parishad and movement against cow slaughter. Saint Vinobaji had declared his intention to go on indefinite fasts if cow slaughter was not prohibited as provided in the directive principles of the Constitution of India. So on 1st April 1979 Santbal went on fasts of 21 days to prevent an eventuality of Vinobāji going on fasts. These fasts of 21 days ended on 22nd April 1979. He was reduced in weight by these fasts by 8 kg.

On 10th of August 1979 Machchhu Dam was damaged and the whole of the Morvi town was practically destroyed by flood. A relief plan for those who suffered was chalked out.

The year 1982 was the last year of his earthly existence. On 16th of January of that year, in response to the call of Vinobaji to arrange the chain of fasts throughout the country in support of prohibition of cow slaughter, Santbalji went on fasts of three days on 22nd of February. All the inmates of Chinchani Ashram went on fasts in response to the call for closing all kitchens in the country in support of cow slaughter prohibition.

Nobody knew that the end of this earthly existence of the Saint was fast approaching. 23rd and 24th of February seem to have passed as usual. In the morning of 25th February, time for offering usual morning prayer approached but the Saint was still found in his bed. This was quite unusual. So, Manibhai, his very close associate and one of the Ashram inmates tried to awaken him saying that it was already five o’clock in the morning. The Saint responded by a smile and some inaudible murmur. It was

clear that he tried to speak but could not. Manibhai understood that there was something wrong. He called other inmates of the Ashram. They all tried to speak with him but they could not get any response except a smile in the face of the Saint. A doctor was called who found that he had an attack of paralysis on his right side. Some immediate treatment was given but for better treatment he was taken in Ambulance to Bombay and got admitted in Harkisandas Hospital under the treatment of Dr. J. K. Mehta. Immediately the news spread and people thronged to see his health at the hospital. Food was given and urination was made with the help of catheters. Within fifteen days he showed remarkable recovery. Dr. Raghuvir Shastri was regularly giving physiotherapeutic treatment. Shri Balwantraji Khanderia, his ardent devotee came from Poona and was throughout present in attendance. On 26th March there was the Silver Jubilee function of Khadi Gram Udyog Mandal at Ranpur and so Manibhai was sent there to attend the function.

Shri Balwantbhai Khanderia who was present throughout in the hospital recorded that on 2nd of March in the evening Santbalji was able to speak for the first time after the attack and said "I am all right". Doctors were surprised at the recovery and all who were in attendance were overjoyed. Thereafter on 16th March the ailing Saint could sit in a chair for half an hour and thereafter on 23rd March he passed the whole day in ease and also gave a message for the Silver Jubilee function at Ranpur.

There were, however, times when he passed through acute agony. Shri Balawantbhai records :

"Sometimes bodily pains were acute and caused him as much distress as it would cause to any of us. However, during such periods he could detach his mind from body and appeared to be completely absorbed in prayer."

He further says :

“During his serious sickness, ‘Ajapa Jap’ and prayers have remained constant source of strength to him.”

When he left his body on 26th March Dr. Shastri was giving him physiotherapy and massage. Balwantbhai was helping him. Both were talking about the efficacy of massage treatment. The Saint must be hearing their talk. A few minutes before that Dr. J. K. Mehta had checked and had expressed his satisfaction about his condition. But suddenly Balwantbhai noticed that both the eyes balls of the Saint were drawn towards the forehead, the heart portion of the chest heaved towards his head and his lips fluttered. Balwantbhai put his hand on his chest and asked : “Gurudev, how are you feeling ?” Dr. Shastri at once took his pulse and declare that everything was over. That was the end. Balwantbhai, who noticed how his soul left his body, is of the opinion that the Saint, who was knowing Yoga, voluntarily ended his life through “Brahmarandhra”.

Ambubhai, the nearest associate and an ardent devotee, records some interesting incidents which occurred during this sickness.

As already noted, he could utter some words, for the first time after the initial attack, on 2nd March. At that time left side of his body was not affected and he could have the movement of his left hand. Ambubhai records that when he uttered a few words on and after 2nd March he used to put his hand against his mouth — a consciousness that a Jain Saint does not speak without a “Muha Patti”.

Thereafter once he uttered “Rajohan” (a broom of woollen shreds usually kept by Jain Saints). The attendants brought his “Rojabem”. Then he uttered “Chinchan” & “Padavihar” giving suggestion that he wanted to go to Chinchan by foot. This was not possible and that was explained to him. Again he repeated and

said “it will be too late”. All these utterances showed that he was willing to return to Chinchin perhaps to die there. He was against using any vehicle for his movement from place to place and many a times he had expressed that he was always in favour of “Padavihar (going on foot) and “Bhikshachari” (begging of alms) by a Jain Muni. He did not forget this even in his serious sickness.

After a few days in the hospital, he refused to take food but on doctor’s advice milk and liquid was given with great efforts and persuasions. He used to say, “What is the use of feeding a paralytic person ?”

When once he could know that he was given water to drink he asked whether it was “Achet” (water made cool after being boiled). This showed how careful he was for observing the rules which a Jain Saint is supposed to observe.

The Saint left his body at about 10-55 a.m. on 26th March at the time when exactly at this time at Ranpur the lecture of Gulam Rasul Kureshi Saheb was being read over at the Silver Jubilee function and regretting the absence of Santbalji. Kureshi Saheb said, “*Vohi Hota hai, Jo Majure Khuda Hota hai*” (only that happens which God wishes to happen). Ambubhai who was reading these lines on behalf of Kureshi Saheb says that on proper adjustment of the timing he could say that the time of the reading of above line coincided exactly with the time when the Saint left his earthly existence.

It is customary that when a Jain Saint of such eminence passes away his belongings are auctioned among the devotees and funds of lacs of Rupees are accumulated. So the large number of devotees who gathered there on his death considered whether his belongings should be put to customary auction. Santbal never

gave prominence to wealth and the devotees knew this very well. They decided to follow him in his death and resolved not to resort to this customary practice.

A palanquin was prepared to carry the dead body. The Saint had full respect for women. So the devotees unanimously agreed that his palanquin should be lifted by four of his lady devotees who were unmarried. These four who were selected were : 1. Meeraben, 2. Prabhaben Ajamera, 3. Kashiben Mehta and 4. Vanitaben. Manibhai Patel, his close associate, was selected to put fire to the funeral pyre. It was perhaps for the first time that the palanquin of a Jain male Saint was lifted by women.

On the sea shore of Chinchan village there is a piece of land donated by the Maharashtra Government to the Mahavirnagar Institute. Santbalji used to go there for his usual walk. There the remains of the Saint are buried and a monument is constructed by the devotees. There are two monumental platforms — one at a higher level and the other at a lower level just touching the former. One at a higher level contains inscription, “*Om, hrin, Arhan Namah*”. (Om ! I bow down to Arhat). The one at lower level contains inscription, “*Om, “Maiya Sharanam Mama”*” (Om, I bow down to Mother Nature). The former is the memorial to his Guru Muni Shri Nanchandraji Maharaj, while the later is memorial to Santbal, as he said he got all inspiration from Mother Nature.

Thus came the end of a life of one who aspired to revolutionise the human society by taking it away from the drudgery of materialist hankering and by infusing in it the ethical values of life.

Though his contemporary Jain society initially could not digest his revolutionary ideas, those who could think objectively could ultimately appreciate his philosophy of life and its logical

exposition and hence accepted him as their Guru. Unlike other Jain Saints he never encouraged the idea of recruiting pupils and followers, and refused to give Diksha to anyone. Like many other Jain Saints he could have accepted the orthodox way of life and could have earned enviable respect and comforts from the orthodox society. He, however, wanted to live for his ideals and fighting against all odds voluntarily preferred the life of untold hardship and turmoil. Walking in the footsteps of great Tirthankaras he lived, worked and died for the poor and the neglected section of humanity and never swerved from the path of truth and righteousness. Persons of his calibre and heights are rarely born.

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BHAL- NALKANTHA PRAYOGIK SANGH - ACTIVITIES

1. Housing
2. Land-Reclamation and Soil Conservation
3. Water Conservation
4. Deepening of tanks for Seasonal Irrigation
5. Construction of tubewell for irrigation
6. Construction of overflow tubewell for domestic use
7. Drinking Water
8. Improved agricultural practices
9. Social Forestry
10. Horticulture
11. Animal Husbandry & Cattle breeding
12. Famine Relief
13. Flood Relief
14. Health
15. Sanitation
16. Education
17. Publication
18. Organisations for Economic and Social activities
19. Rural Co-operatives
20. Gram Panchayat
21. Khadi & Village Industries
22. Go-Seva
23. Organisation of Scheduled Tribe (Padhars)
24. Development of Rural Children, their families and villages
(Christian Children Fund-CCF)
25. Agitation against Social and Economic injustice
26. Eradication of bad habits and bad social customs.
27. Santi Sena & Suddhi Prayog
28. Arbitration (Lok Adalat)
29. Research and Development including development and transfer of Rural Technology

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"Bombay Public Trust Act" - A legal commentary in English.

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