

19. ShataVadhani Pandit-Ratna Shri Ratnachandraji Maharaj

Introduction:

The Kutchchha region in the west India is known for its brave man, their simplicity and spirituality. The region is almost a desert and yet the people have tender hearts. Their daily life is tightly fixed. At a village named Bhorara a Visha Oshwal family was residing where the couple Shri Veerpal Sheth and Shrimati Laxmibai had two sons Nathubhai and Rayshibhai. The younger son Rayshibhai was later known as Shri Ratnachandraji Maharaj. He was born in. 1880.

In those days, education was much less and the region of Kutchchha was very backward. Hence Rayshi was put up to a village school. He was bright in learning. He could remember his lessons very quickly. He passed seventh standard at the age of ten and since there was no accommodation for further study in this village, their relatives sent up both the brothers to Mumbai for training in business. Thus both the brothers joined the business of food grains. Rayshi was serious in nature and hence he remained away from games. He could establish himself very well in the business, he had to go to a village Sanavad near Indore very frequently for business matters; and during these days he learnt English which was good enough for reading postal letters, telegrams etc. He had now good experience of trading in food grains and he started his own business at Mimbai in partnership with Shri Keshavji Devji who was also a merchant from Kutchchha. He could earn very well by reaching the age of 13 when he was feeling tired in business, he used to play gambling as it was the way of entertainment and it was being played in all corners of the society in those days.

Retirement in Monsoon and Study in Scriptures:

The merchants of Kutchchha in those days were moving to various cities and villages for eight dry months of the year in their business affairs and coming back to their native place to pass the monsoon. They used to keep themselves in the company of saints and mendicants, pray to gods, chant holy names and phrases on rosary and participated in religious festivals. Rayshibhai was married to a girl named Hansbai at the age of 13, as it was the prevailing practice in the region. During three years of his marriage, he had to stay at Mumbai and visit Sanavad, Belapur and other towns for business but used to come to his native village Bhorara in monsoons. During these days he was meeting Shri Gulabchandraji Maharaj of Limbdi sect and many mendicants who were his followers and disciples. Rayshibhai used to go to meet them at Limbdi, Mundra, Anjar and other places. He was inspired to live a spiritual life with detachment feelings in worldly affairs.

Detachment and Dixa:

There was an event in 1895 which led him to be firm in his feelings of detachment. When he was a Belapur, he received a letter from his home that his wife Hansbai had died giving birth to a girl child. Hearing this news, Rayshibhai wrote a letter to his elder brother at Mumbai requesting him to inform relatives at Bhorara that they should not think for his second marriage. Rayshibhai was naturally pained to hear the death of his wife but he could get a company of two or three religious minded friends of Kutchchha. He therefore, passed much of his time in reading scriptures and discussing spiritual matters. He came to Bombay after two-three months and he had the company of some mendicants of Khambhat sect. He returned to native village Bhorara after a few months with the consent of his elder brother. Shri Gulabchandraji Maharaj was spending his monsoon of 1896 in this village. The villagers had known that Rayshibhai has declined to re-marry and by that time his elder brother also wrote a letter to him approving his decision not to re-marry. The mother Laxmibai pressed much for the marriage of Rayshibhai because no mother would be willing to allow her son of 16 years to go for Dixa. The father was silent all the while in this matter. The mother tried her best to keep her son within the family and get him re-married but she could not succeed and at last in 1897,

Shri Rayshibhai of the age of 17 was granted Dixa in the large presence of many saints, mendicants and nuns of all-around Jain Sangh. Rayshibhai established Shri Gulabchandrajī Maharaj as his great teacher and adopted the name of Shri Ratnachandrajī Maharaj. His formal Dixa celebrations were held at Mundra after seven days.

Deep Study and Rigorous Penance:

His feelings of detachment duly held since childhood was now becoming stronger. He kept himself fully engaged in the study of religious books and meditation. After regular Dixa at Mundra, the Sangh started to go to Mandvi (Kutchchha). He started with the study of the Sanskrit grammar at Deshalpur village on the way. This was the first day of bright half of the month Ashadh and then completed the first part of Siddhanta Chandrika by studying under the learned gentleman Shastriji who had come from Jamnagar. He completed second part of Siddhanta Chandrika in 1899 at Anjar. Alongwith this, he studied RaghuVansh, Shrutbodh, Vrutta Ratnakar and other scriptures. His power of memory was very strong. He was very intelligent. Hence during the monsoon of 1900 at Jamnagar and that of 1901 at Junagadh, he completed the study of Siddhanta Kaumudi, Shishupal Vadh, Kuvalayanand Karika and other books by studying under various learned men Shastrijis. In the next six months he studied very deeply the TarkSangrah, Nyaya Bodhini, Nyaya Dipika, Nyaya Siddhanta Muktaivali, Sadhanika and Dinkari. These six great books are considered to be very difficult for study. This was not enough. He further studied grammar books of Manorama, Shabdendu Shekhar etc and many other books viz. Anuyogdwar, Chandra Pragnapti, Surya Pragnapti, Dash Vaikalik etc. During the four months of monsoon of 1904 at Anjar he studied English, Arithmetic and Astrology. He completed study of Panch Laxmi, Siddhanta Laxan, Ras Gangadhar, Sankhya Tattva Kaumudi, Nyaya, Sahitya, Darshan Shastras etc. by staying under the famous scholar Shastri SahshiNath Jha of the Mithila City before the monsoon of 1905 spent at Khedoi. While moving in villages of Kutchchha after the monsoon of 1905 at Khedoi, he was caught by the disease of small pox. He could recover from it after some months. He then studied Vyutpattivad; Shaktivad, Sadharan Hettavabhas and other scriptures under very well learned Shastri Balkrishna Mishra at Chotila. This was the last study in the Nyaya Shastra and it ended in 1908.

Thus he completed ten years of his Dixa-life at the age of 27 in hard studies but he was caught by eye-disease when he was spending his monsoon at Jamnagar in 1900 and he had now to wear spectacles. Even after this he remained sick of fever, smallpox, obsesses, ear and throat troubles of and on. Even with all these troubles, he continued his studies and other activities and thus showed his detachment towards his body. He held high character and ideal behavior at all times.

Service to Literature:

He started developing his power of concentration since 1907. He started writing Bhavna Shatak and Kartavya Kaumudi in Sanskrit during the monsoon of 1908. He was unusually intelligent, he could grasp difficult subjects very easily and he could anticipate circumstances very well. He went on earning success after success and could acquire power to perform eight avadhan, 17 avadhan and 50 avadhan during the first year itself (these are all sorts of religious rites). He could mind to several things at a time and this is an exceptional power in human beings. The man possessing extraordinary power of memory only can achieve from such a success.

He had received inspiration and encouragement from Pandit Shri Gatulalji, Pandit Shri Shankarlal Maheshwar and Shrimad Rajchandrajī who had adopted a few years before. Because of his deep study, continuous thinking, repeated meditations and unusual power of understanding, he could acquire power to perform one hundred very shortly. After sometime he made experiments of this power at Gurukul Panchkula and since then he was known as Bharat Bhushan and ShataVadhani.

He was well studied in languages, grammar and poetics and hence he could complete the stanzas of poetry in Sanskrit and Gujarati spontaneously. His ability in this respect is clearly seen in his discourses with the great poet Shri Nanalal, Shastri Shri Ramkrishna Harshji, Shri Keshavlal Dhruva, Shri Hirachand Motichand, Shri Popatlal Punjabhai, Shri Kesharmalji Choradia of Jaipur, Shri Ramchandrajji Bhatt of Alwar, Pandit Shriman Narayanji and other learned personalities. The blind great man, i.e. the man whose knowledge itself are his eyes, Pandit Sukhlalji Sanghvi while paying him tribute said, "He was a mendicant of his own class, he could mind hundreds of works at a time and it appears that the Gujaratis only have acquired such a power through inheritance". He referred to Sahasra Vadhani Mooni Sunder Soori, Upadhyaya Shri Yashovijayaji, Shri Gatulalji, Shrimad Raychandrajji, Shri Shankarlal Shastri, Mooni Shri Santbalji and many other saints and scholars of Gujarat some of whom had been in the 15th century. Thinking in spiritual way, the power of a person does not depend on how many Avadhan he is able to perform at a time but on his learning, his seriousness, his thinking and meditation. The power of performing Avadhan should not be a source of earning popularity but it should be helpful in acquiring holiness of soul, deep and long meditation and heart-felt prayers so that development of soul can be achieved. One can reach the highest peak of life and everyone who exposes his power of making Avadhan must remember this thing: Avadhan means the power of concentration, power of doing or remembering many things at a time.

At Ajmer Conference of Mendicants:

In his days, there were differences and conflicts between Sthanakvasi sect of mendicants and other Shravaks-i.e. Jain family-holders. There was internal fighting and hence the groups were being loose day by day. Many of them felt that there should be common code of conduct for all sects of Jain mendicants and then only such conflicts can be brought to an end. Many efforts, it was decided to hold a summit conference of all Jains including mendicants, nuns, saints, followers, disciples, Shravakas and others of Ajmer. All the sects of mendicants and others from the whole of Gujarat-Saurashtra, Malva, Rajasthan and Punjab in addition to Shri Durlabhjibhai Zaveri, Shri Dhirajlal Turakhia, Shri Hemchandbhai Mehta, who were desirous of doing good for the Jain community and the great poet Shri Nanalal, Pragnachakshu Pandit Sukhlalji-a blind but highly learned man having his knowledge only as his eyes-, Pandit Bechardasji, Shri JinVijayaji and the ruler of Limbdi Shri Dolatsinghji helped very much for convening this summit conference. There were 238 saints, 40 nuns and thousands of male and female Shravaks attending this summit conference. This long awaited Conference began from in 1933. There were 32 mendicants from Gujarat. Mooni Shri Ratnachandrajji Maharaj had the honor of making an opening ceremony and initial address. Shri Ratnachandrajji of Gujarat and Shri Udaychandji of Punjab were appointed as peacekeepers. The authors of the proceedings were Shri Atmaramji and Shri Santbalji. There was welcome-compromise on the issues of appointments on the positions of Yuvacharya and Upadhyaya, Fixation of monsoons and power to grant the certificate of freedom from lapses. Many mendicants of the same sects moving in different states happened to meet and acquaint themselves in this summit conference.

Travelling in North India:

A mendicant must keep on moving. Maintaining this trend, Maharaj Shri Ratnachandrajji started towards Jaipur as soon as this summit conference was over. It is prescribed that Jain mendicants must go on moving from place to place in dry days of the year for contacts with the people, to preach them, to maintain detachment with the world, (by staying at one place, some attachments are bound to come up), to strengthen restraint in life by gaining experiences from various walks of worldly life and to maintain good health. Shri Nanchandrajji Maharaj went towards Agra and Shri Ratnachandrajji Maharaj stayed at Jaipur to preach the people during the monsoon after the Ajmer conference at the request of various Jain Sanghs. The people had thought that mendicants and disciples in large number would study in Sanskrit, Prakrit and Jain Agams under Ratnachandrajji Maharaj. There was

no much response to this thought and only four mendicants from Punjab, and eight from Rajasthan only took up studies under Maharaj Shree. We see here that Gujarati mendicants were not much interested in Jain study. Maharaj Shri Ratnachandraji also studied astrology and astronomy under Shri Kedarnath who was the president of the Observatory of Jaipur. He also wrote an important critical essay on Revtidan during this monsoon. Because of unbearable heat, a mendicant Mooni Shri KapurVijayji was sick while going to Alwar. He had smallpox and also pneumonia. He expired within eight days. This caused deep pains to Shri Ratnachandraji Maharaj and since there was no time to go further in travelling, he had to pass his monsoon of 1944 at Alwar.

In Punjab ViaDelhi:

After Alwar-monsoon, Maharaj Shri Ratnachandraji moved towards Delhi. People from all religious and all sections of the society came to hear Maharaj Shree in large number, as his lectures were inspiring with clear impression of his very high learning. He was awarded the title of Bharat Ratna here. After completing his stay at Delhi, Maharaj Shri Ratnachandraji went towards Amritsar via Rohtak with young Maharaj Shri Kashiramji. He passed through many small villages and was very much unhappy seeing differences and disputes for small reasons among Jain mendicants and also in Jain families. He tried to bring out acceptable compromise with best of his efforts in all possible cases. The Jain community here was under deep influence of Arya Samaj and taking a note of this he tried hard to expand Jain thoughts and studies by staying at Rohtak. During this travelling he could meet Rishiji Amolakhji and Aryaji Parvatibai. When Maharaj Shri Ratnachandraji entered Amritsar after passing through Jalandhar, Kapurthala and Vyas, he was welcomed with great enthusiasm and interest by the local Jain Sangh. He was Shri Sohanlalji Maharaj here and then started forward to reach Jammu via Sialkot, Gujaranwala, Lahore and other places. By his effective lectures, even the non-Jains left taking wine and meat. On his return he spent monsoon at Amritsar in 1935 and he established Shri Sohan Jain Dharm Pracharak Samiti during this stay. This Samiti later started the great study home Shri Parshvanath VidyaShram affiliated with the Government Sanskrit College under the inspiration and encouragement of Maharaj Shri Ratnachandraji. Moreover an open celebrations to award the title of Poojya to Shri Kashiramji Maharaj was also accomplished in these days. The Jain community awarded the title of Vidya Bhushan to Maharaj Shri Ratnachandraji. He continued his moving in Punjab and at last came to Balachor, the place of very high natural beauty after passing through Nalagadh, Ambala, Panchkula and Simla. While moving through this cold region, Maharaj Shri and his disciples happened to be sick very frequently, but the group at last reached Delhi even by very slow moving.

Desire to Go to Kashi-Benaras:

Maharaj Shri Ratnachandraji was inspired to go to Kashi-Benaras by the blind but highly learned personality Pandit Sukhlalji Sanghvi so that he can have comparative study of Jain Religion as a whole with many Jain Sanghs believing different sects of Jainism. He, therefore, moved to Agra, Vrindavan, Mathura and other holy places of pilgrimage and looked at them with Jain spirit to thinking. He had pain in his ears at Agra; he suffered from blood pressure and other ailments. He could not proceed further and had to stay at Agra for the monsoon of 1938. He had to put off his idea of going to Kashi-Benaras. He started towards Rajasthan as soon as monsoon was over. He fixed his monsoon of 1939 to be passed at Ajmer. He made long discussions with the prominent Shravaks and Jain mendicants of Delhi and Agra but the questions of Annual Celebrations of Jains and common code of conduct for Jain mendicants could not be solved.

Last Monsoon:

With his long movements in cold regions, irregularities in eating and constant working for the unity of various units of Jain community, his health was becoming weaker and weaker day by day. He had

trouble of prostate gland and could not pass urine easily. Thinking that he will have good treatment at Mumbai, he started for Mumbai and at last underwent operation of prostate gland at the hospital of Dr. T.O. Shah. The operation was successful but he was suffering from pneumonia, gas and other diseases. He was somewhat well only after four-five months.

He always thought for united Jain community and expansion of Jainism. For this purpose he discussed again and again with Shri Harshchandra Doshi, editor of Jain Prakash, Shri Girdharlal Daftari, secretary of Mumbai Sakal Sangh, Shri Chunilal Vardhman Shah, a great writer and prominent intellectuals educationist and social workers. He talked about three sections, viz. Veer Shraman Sangh, Veer Brahmachari Sangh and Veer Shravak Sangh also in details.

On for Eternal Journey:

Maharaj Shri Ratnachandrajji was suffering from high blood pressure and his trouble increased because of hard work day and night. According to the note of Shri Jamnadas Udani, Maharaj Shri had more than an hour long discussion with him about the working of Veer Sangh in May 14th 1941 AD. The doctor advised him to go to Devlali and he replied, "I am now at peace, and nothing need be done for a few days". He was little better on the next day, but he had very fast breathing at night at about 2-30 hours, he felt attack of paralysis also. Blood pressure went up to 230 and even before a specialist doctor can come from Mumbai; Maharaj Shri Ratnachandrajji left his mortal body in the early morning of Friday at 04-50 hours. As soon as the news of his demise was out, people from Calcutta, Rangoon, Madras and other places rushed in thousands to see him last. Some sent their condolence messages by telegram. He was cremated at Ghatkopar in the presence of thousands of his devotees, disciples and followers and nuns in addition to Shravaks and others.

Here are the living monumental works at Maharaj Shri Ratnachandrajji. These reveal his multi-faced ability:

- Pandit Shri Ratnachandrajji Jain Kanyashala, i.e. Girls schools at Ghatkopar.
- ShataVadhani Ratnachandrajji Pustakalaya. A library-affiliated with Shri Parshvanath VidyaShram, Benaras.
- Shri Ratnachandrajji Sthanakvasi Jain Pustakalaya, Kathor-i.e. a Library.
- ShataVadhani Pandit Ratnachandrajji Jain Gnan Mandir- (School for religions study) at Surendranagar.
- Shri Jain Sahitya Pracharak Samiti- Beawar.

Experiences in Travelling at Different Places

Many events and incidences are connected with the movements from one place to another by Jain saints and mendicants. Mooni Shri Ratnachandrajji had several experiences while moving through Rajasthan, Marwar, North India and many other places and these indicates his virtues of restraint, fearlessness, determination and tolerance. We shall see some of these events hereunder:

(1)

Mooni Shri Ratnachandrajji was coming towards Jaipur via Agra and Bharatpur. It was hardly half an hour to the sunset on the way when he came near a temple. He stopped there and he thought to pass the night in this temple. He had passed several nights in temples before this and he was confident that he would allow staying for a night in this temple. It was, however, replied from the temple that nobody is allowed to sleep in the temple at night. There was an inn near the temple and a man pointed to that inn. Maharajji went there. It was an open space on three sides and the floor was also not repaired by clay or cow dung etc. Many cartmen used to come there and lighted fire to be

free from cold. It was a night of very severe cold and yet Maharaj Shri and his disciples passed that night in such an inconvenient place.

(2)

Once Maharaj Shri came to a railway station at Basi and many times sadhus, saints, mendicants were allowed to pass night in such small railway stations. But the present stationmaster declined and asked them to go in the nearby village. One person said there was small rooms just near by the roadside and they may stay there overnight. It was only 15 minutes left for sunset. The small room was very old and it was a risk to stay in. It was almost a hut and can be pulled down by a little pressure. There was no door. The floor was badly uneven. It was full of dust. There were footprints of wild animals also. In spite of this, the group with Maharaj Shree passed their night in such a place without any impatience or unrest in mind.

(3)

Once Mooni Shri Ratnachandraji was returning from Ajmer. He came to a railway station named Eranpura Road. He started on foot from here. According to a guidebook, one small railway station named Kotar was nearby. Maharaj Shri and his disciples reached Kotar just at the time of sunset. The station was merely a lonely place and there was no stationmaster also. At a little distance, a railway joint-man was residing in a small room. He allowed Maharaj Shri and his disciples to stay at the railway station for the night. At night the group had completed Pratikraman and other religious rites and they were simply talking. At about half past nine, a constable came. He knew Maharaj Shree to some extent. The constable said, "This station was not lonely like this before some years, but there are repeated thefts here since last three-four years and two-three station masters were looted and severely beaten. Hence this station is useless. The guard of the train himself gives the tickets to the passengers when the train arrives. One train comes at ten o'clock night and the other at ten o'clock morning. I have to be present here before half an hour of the time of arrival of the train. Many trains come and go after ten hours but none of them has stoppage at this station. The thieves meet together here at about mid-night and you have put at such a place of acute danger. It is not safe to stay here. So you all come to me at my room which at about quarter of a mile from here.

Maharaj Shri Ratnachandraji heard this and said, "Brother! We cannot move to some other place at night. We have nothing which the thieves will take away from us." All the mendicants and Maharaj stayed there only. There was heavy rain at night and no thieves came there and the Moonies passed their night very peacefully.

On the other day when going from this place, they met with a tiger but the group maintained total silence. The tiger continued walking on his way and thus went away.

(4)

Maharaj Shri and his disciples were experiencing great hardships in getting food and water in unknown place where there were no Jains. If they had to pass through a railway station, and the village is far away, they would request the engine driver that would allow them to drink hot water of railway engine. During his movements in village of Punjab in cold days, he was getting hot water to drink but no body was heating water in summer and hence he could not get hot water to drink in summer. He had, therefore, to do with buttermilk.

He could not get buttermilk or water in a village named Sahadara, which is at a distance of about five miles from Lahore. Villagers used to sell their milk at Lahore and never prepared curd from which buttermilk can be obtained. As such he could get food to eat but nothing to drink. At about five o'clock evening, a factory was started and he could get hot water to drink. Maharaj Shri and his disciples drank this hot water and then took some food.

(5)

In addition to such difficulties, Maharaj Shree had to face insults and abuses while asking for alms from non-Jains some asked them to stand at the gate and then gave raw food as if they were giving it to a beggar. But when they were said that Jain mendicants do ask for alms but they are not beggars, they called in these mendicants into their house and then only Jain mendicants could accept some food from such houses.