

## 36. Shravak Shiromani Sahoo Shri Shantiprasadji

Shravak Shiromani means the greatest among the Shravaks-ardent believers in Jainism.

### Childhood and Education:

He was one of the most outstanding Jain gentlemen of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He achieved religion, health, desires, wealth and salvation in most appropriate ways. He has been successful in his mission of life. He was born on May 22, 1911 at Najibabad of the Bijnor district of Uttar Pradesh. The roots and forest of Himalayas and the borders of Gadhwal District are not very far from here. The name of his grandfather was Salekhchandra. He was famous as a religious man as well as a social worker in his region. Shri Diwansinhji and Shrimati Moortidevi were the parents of Shri Shantiprasadji.

His primary education was in Najibabad and college education was first in Meerut and later at Benaras Hindu University. He was very clever in his studies. He had passed his B.Sc. degree examination with first class.

He was well cultured in the family. He did not miss to go to temple regularly even at his advanced age. He used to visit Hastinapur and other holy places and participate in religious celebrations.

RamaRani was his wife. She was the only daughter of famous Marwari Industrialist Shri Ramkrishna Dalmiya. Her mother died in her childhood and so she was brought up under the care of Sheth Jamnalal Bajaj. She was therefore deeply influenced by patriotism, self-supporting, self-confidence and secularism right from her childhood. With the marriage of Shri Shantiprasadji two top, wealth and cultured families came together. Their good deeds grew very soon within only 10 to 15 years the family took a foremost place among prestigious families of India.

Shantiprasadji had three sons named Ashok, Alok and Manoj, and one daughter named Alka. As the wealth of the family increased, he was more inclined to the service of the society and expands cultural activities among others. He had various types of professions; he was deeply involved in industry and business. He was extremely intelligent, he could know and test the men, he was liberal towards his staff and workers. He has foresight of a big industrialist and administrator. He, therefore, took up foremost position in the industrial sector of India. Here was the meeting of both money and education and this lead the family to be famous in the whole country.

Shri Shantiprasadji was kind, noble, liberal, simple and most cultured. He loved mankind. He had high traditions of his family and forefathers. He was impressed by the helpful nature of his mother. Service to society was the tradition of this family since many generations and this was apparent in the life of Shri Shantiprasadji since his age of 18 years. He took advanced participation at the All India Youth Conference at Hastinapur in 1929 and we would see his real for unity, administrative skill and co-operation. This was indicative of his future greatness. He and his wife RamaRani rendered great services, granted valuable guidance, inspiration and enthusiasm at the annual conference of All India Digambar Jain Parishad in the summer of 1940 at Lucknow and since then the Jains accepted them as their leaders and advisers. There were burning problems of widow-marriage, inter-caste marriage, dowry etc and differences prevailed between old and new generations. He could succeed in solving most of these problems to a great extent and many of his suggestions were accepted by almost the whole of Jain community. He made efforts for unity among Jains of various sects. He became the chief of Bharat Jain MahaMandal and encouraged the caste brothers to establish unity and co-operation. He established Digambar Jain MahaSamiti in 1974 with a purpose to make it an all-accepted institution of all Digambar Jain community and increase religious-attachments among them. At the time of our independence struggle and also at the time of wars with Pakistan in 1965 and 1971, he made long discussions with the Prime Ministers Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri and Smt. Indira Gandhi

and lent all-out cooperation. He made great donations for General Hospitals, Universities, and creation of public education institutions. Services towards Education, Literature, Culture and Religion:

With the rise of his good deeds in his previous lives, justful policies in Industry and Business and extra-ordinary business skill, he earned wealth very rapidly and with the increase of wealth, the family turned to make large charity for social and cultural works. This can be seen from some of his following works: -

- Established Moortidevi Girls school in Najibabad in 1921.
- Started scholarships titled Moortidevi Scholarships under the auspices of Sahoo Jain Trust. The scholarships are granted for Shastri Degree at Syadvad Mahavidyalaya, Benaras, and Acharya, M.A. Ph.D. and D.Litt. degrees. Many students have taken advantage of these scholarships upto now and have given their services in the fields of Religion, Scriptures, Literature, History, and Sanskrit and Prakrit languages.
- and (iv) Bharatiya Gnanpith and Moortidevi Granthmala. Shri Shantiprasadji Sahoo established the two great institutions on 18-2-1944 with the consent and co-operation of his family. High level literature, both old and modern is being published in Sanskrit, Hindi, Prakrit, English, Tamil, Kannad and other languages. About 100 books have been published from these publishing houses so far. The books are edited in modern style.
- Gnanpith Award: An award of Rs.1,50,000 is granted for the best book written and published in the 14 national languages listed in our constitution. The subjects must be about mankind, humanity and national culture. Covering him with a Shawl on his shoulders honors the author. Such literary activity of national level has not been on record in the history of India ever before and therefore, we respect the promoters of this activity for their nobility, love for literature, patriotism and fore-sightedness.

### **Contribution in Journalism:**

Shri Shantiprasadji had wide industrial and business dealings and hence he had to create relations with advertisement media, periodicals and newspapers. In around 1945, the publication of NavBharat Times began from Delhi and in 1955, the Benett Colmann Company was taken over by the Sahoo family from its original proprietor of Times of India. Since these days he has worked to maintain highest efficiency of his group in Indian Journalism. He ensured that the propagandist activities be full of varieties, highly attractive and of highest level in its quality to create deep-most impressions on the on lookers. They maintained high level of English language but simultaneously granted even higher importance to Hindi language thereby supporting the national level of Hindi in all features of life.

In addition to this he rendered help, openly as well as secretly too many schools, Pathshalas (schools for religious study), libraries, research institutes and numberless poor students.

### **Special Religious Services:**

The celebrations of the 2500<sup>th</sup> day of Lord Mahavir's eternal journey to heaven were successfully held at regional, national and international levels. The highest credit for these celebrations if at all it is to be given; it can be given only to Shri Shantiprasadji Sahoo. He made best use of his personal relations and inspired the President, Vice-President and Prime Minister of these days to take part in these celebrations, he got sufficient land allocated for the Grand National memorial of Lord Mahavir at Delhi through the Government. He was the working President of this widespread celebration-committee. It was he who encouraged for creating various Jain Committees at District, State and National levels so that these celebrations do not remain confined to big cities only but also expand upto very small villages of the country thereby carrying the message of world-friendship, equal respect for all religions and spirituality of Lord Mahavir to these remote places. He had spared the buildings of his offices at Mumbai, Calcutta, Delhi and other places for this purpose. The credit of bringing

together all the four sections of Jainism in India lender one religious flag at Delhi on the occasion of these celebrations goes to Shri Shantiprasadji Sahoo. He earns great credit for publication of "Samansuttam" also.

## **Great Interest for Learning in Jainism:**

The All India Oriental Conference was held at Benaras in 1968 under the auspice of Benaras Sanskrit Vishva Vidyalaya (University). There was no programme for Jainism there at. When Shantiprasadji came to know this, he took immediate steps and arranged for inclusion of discussion on Jainism and top ranking learned personalities in Jainism were invited specially for taking part in them.

He has either established or given big donations to the following institutions:

- Prakrit Research Institute, Vaishali (Bihar)
- Syadvad Mahavidyalaya (college), Benaras
- S. P. Jain College, SasaramNagar, Bihar
- Non-violence Expansion Committee, Calcutta
- Varni Sanskrit Vidyalaya (school), Sagar
- Sahoo Archaeological Museum, Devgad
- All India Digambar Jain Holy Places Committee, Mumbai
- Digambar Jain Committee
- Sahoo Jain College, Najibabad
- Indian Art Jain Research Institute, MoodBadri
- Shraman Jain songs Propagandist Sangh(Karnatak)-Delhi- (inspired by Mooni Vidyanandji)
- Other religious works:
- Veer Nirman Bharti- He granted prizes to all the Jain learned personalities without discriminating of their sect or beliefs-through this institution
- There was hardly any religious celebration at state or national level in which he has not directly or indirectly remained present and provided guidance, leadership and special help during his last 25 years of life.
- He respected all learned and dedicated personalities of Jainism. He attended their lectures and preaching discourses even by time out of his busy schedule of other engagements. He took active part in discussions on philosophy, spirituality, daily activities of an ideal Jain, family life of a Shravak etc.
- He always raised his voice where there was injustice to the cause of Jainism in his capacity of a prominent leader of Jains of the whole of India and got the matter rectified by taking active interest.

## **Last Days:**

Shri Shantiprasadji Sahoo had great real and enthusiasm at the time of the celebrations of 2500<sup>th</sup> day of Lord Mahavir's departure from this world to heaven and he had suffered much strain for the success of these celebrations. The body, however, takes its own course. In these days, his beloved wife RamaRani expired on July 22, 1975. He had her life long cooperation, inspiration and love. He felt this blow very severely. He tried to face these calamities, but he was taken over by heart disease and he was taken away from this world on October 27, 1977. Lacs of eyes shed tears. Jain community all over India passed condolence resolutions. The whole Jain community and especially

the Digambar Jains have lost their most beloved leader. They feel helplessness and loss of leadership.

Thus, Shri Shantiprasadji Sahoo is now no more with us. He has given most outstanding services in the fields of national, social, cultural, literary and religious activities for more than 40 years. His good deeds will inspire us all for the centuries to come. He has left special message for the youth of the present age. The youth should always be eager to extend selfless services to the society and never turn back to sacrifice his own interest for the many. The contribution of Shrimati RamaRani was not less in the success of her husband Shri Shantiprasadji Sahoo. She was an ideal wife devoted to the family as also to the Jain community around. She was sympathetic to all. She deserves to be equally respected as Shri Shantiprasadji.

The successors of Shri Shantiprasadji, - his elder brother Shri Shreyansprasadji and son Shri Ashokkumar are following the foot steps of Shri Shantiprasadji. They are devoted to the service of the common people, especially to the Jains and so we feel some relief in the pains of losing the great person, Shri Shantiprasadji Sahoo.