

## 29. ShreshthiVarya Shri Kasturbhai Lalbhai

(ShreshthiVarya means respected among the great man)

### Tradition of Great Men:

Shri Shantidas Zaveri who happened in the tenth generation before Shri Kasturbhai was granted a title of Nagarsheth of Ahmedabad under the ordinance of emperor Akbar as he was a unique person to respect the emperors, his wealth and his devotion to religion. This is evident from the historic evidence of his very big donation to emperor ShahJahan for making the famous Mayarasan-The king's seat. In this tradition there was Motichand, the elder brother of Sheth Hemabhai, and Sheth Lalbhai was the grandson of his grandson. Sheth Kasturbhai was the son of Sheth Lalbhai. Sheth Lalbhai had established the Raipur Textile Mills in 1896. Sheth Kasturbhai has, thus, the culture of textile industry since his childhood. Sheth Lalbhai lived for only 57 years but he had earned respect and love from all the members of his family. He was instant on discipline, good behavior, and respect to elders, management and devotion to the work on hand. Sheth Kasturbhai was born on December, 19 1894 in the lap of Mohiniba in Ahmedabad.

### Childhood and Learning:

Kasturbhai had two brothers and four sisters. He used to play cricket and fly kites with his younger brother Narottambhai. He passed his matriculation in 1911 by studying in R.C. High School. There were great teachers like late Shri Ballubhai Thakore and Jivanlal Diwan who were deeply affected by national spirit. They did influence their students. Kasturbhai was thus, invested with love for motherland right from his young age. The family was devoted to religion and Kasturbhai used to go to see God with his mother, brother and sister's everyday. He had gone to see holy places like Abu, Palitana, SametShikhar etc. He had, thus, inborn virtues of culture, discipline, nationalism and also learning. His father Lalbhai suddenly died in 1912 when Kasturbhai was studying in Gujarat College. He took up the big business of his father with the pressing advice of all relatives. He had learnt good English with the help of private teachers so that it may be helpful in foreign tours.

### Family Life and Efficiency in Business:

In the business, he had first to work as a timekeeper and then in stored department. While working in stores he had to check up the quality of cotton and Kasturbhai went to several districts and village to study the various qualities of cotton and he was considered to be an expert in cotton-examination in the whole of India within a few years. There was First World War in 1914 and textile industry got a great boost. The Raipur Mills began to produce cloth of very high quality. Kasturbhai had fixed some basic principles like

- Maintain high quality of goods
- To plan for long term profits
- Best quality of cotton and over raw material is used.
- Employ tested experts in various sections and allow them to work freely
- Brokers, merchants, shareholders and assistants should be given satisfactory returns and they must be treated very well.

Thus, the Raipur Mills were considered to be one of the best textile mills in India. In these years, he was married to Shardaben, the daughter of Shri Chimanlal Vadilal who was a famous jeweler in Ahmedabad. His marriage was celebrated with simplicity and, thus, Kasturbhai entered for family life in May 1915.

## **Contacts with Leaders:**

There were three important events, which brought him in contact with Mahatma Gandhiji, Sardar Patel, Dada Malvankar, Diwan Jivanlal and others. These events were:

- Strike of Mill-workers in 1918.
- Draught in Gujarat and
- Congress General Conference o 1921.

Kasturbhai proved his ability, efficiency, patience, honesty, broad-heartedness, long-term thinking, sincerity and devotion in dealing with these circumstances. He was hardly 27 years of age in these days and all were impressed by his style of working. He himself had deeper confidence in him and he, then, another textile mills-Ashok Mills-with capital outlay of Rs. 12,00,000. This Mills also came out to be the most successful venture and it produced high quality of cloth.

At the time of Congress Conference, Shri Motilal Nehru and other leaders lived with Kasturbhai who could see their daily routine and was very much impressed by it. With this, Kasturbhai decided to make his life very great. He became more interested in national issues. Shri Vallabhbhai Patel had made an open request for donation for the expansion of primary teaching in Ahmedabad when he was the president of the Municipality in 1921 and the Kasturbhai family donated Rs. 50,000 for it. Kasturbhai thus, came out to be most charitable, able administrator and a great patriot in the country. He established his industry very well and proved his ability in the fields of industry and business.

## **Member of Legislative Assembly:**

In 1922, Sardar Vallabhbhai suggested his name as a representative of Mill Owners Association in the higher legislative assembly at Delhi and Kasturbhai was successful after hard efforts. He earned good experience of the working of parliament through this position. He was appointed in several committees related to industry, purchase of cotton and textile policy by the British Government and even after independence, Kasturbhai worked on several positions related to industry, banking, public enterprises, Reserve Bank and other sections under instructions of Jawaharlal Nehru. He worked on all these positions very well and he became famous for his long sightedness, honesty and patriotism. There was hardly a person who can complete with him in matters of purchase of cotton and policies related to textile.

## **Towards New Industries:**

After the untimely demise of his father in 1912, Kasturbhai confined himself in the textile industry upto now but now it was difficult to absorb all the members of the great family in this industry alone and it was necessary to think of other industries. This was required in the national interest also in 1937, his attention was drawn to the business of starch, but he had to go to America in 1946 and then he started with the talks of co-operation with Cyanamid Company of America and then 800 acres of land was procured near Valsad in the name of Atul products. Kasturbhai entrusted the work of developing and planning to one of his most trusted gentleman Shri B.K. Majmudar who worked very well and an ideal industrial complex was opened on March 17, 1952 at the hands of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. The plan went on developing and when the Indian Government granted a loan of Rs. 3 crores in 1965, the development was much expedited. At present, this industry is exporting goods of crores of rupees to foreign countries. There are 1500 quarters for the staff and about 5500 men of surrounding area are getting permanent livelihood from this industry. There is production of several medicines, chemicals and various colors in this industrial complex. This is the story o the development of the industry itself but this Atul has worked towards educational, cultural and social welfare also. These services are particularly notable. The staff is given meals at confessional rates, there is open-air theatre, and clubs for games and entertainment, activities of general knowledge, and culture, art and

skill are also being carried on extensively. There is good arrangement for the learning of more than 2000 children and students. There are facilities for health protection, clinics etc. In addition, all the members of the family including Shri Majmudar, Shri Siddharthbhai, his wife Vimlaben are taking deep interest for the all-round development of this tribal area of Valsad District. This not only praise worthy but also worth to be followed by others. Thus, "Atul" is the highest dream of Shri Kasturbhai that has come true at Valsad.

## **National Fervor:**

Shri Kasturbhai had acquaintance with several national leaders since 1921 when dealing with the strike of mill workers, at the time of Congress Conference and in connection with matters of Industry, Bank, business etc. Even though Kasturbhai was wishing well of everybody, he was primarily interested in the good of the nation. He did not mind to forego his own advantages in national interests were to suffer. He even suffered losses many a times so that national interest can be upheld.

He was always eager to maintain good relations with mill-workers, staff members and shareholders. He used to remain present with them at the events of their pains and pleasures. He had created self-interests with them and they also respected him like an elder of their family. Kasturbhai always-encouraged production and use of Indian goods, he was foremost to help at the time of natural calamities like flood, draught, earthquake etc. He had healthy relations and respects for national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Motilal Nehru and others. He always helped the national movements directly as well as indirectly.

He was at the key position in the proceedings for development of Kandla port as a major port of the country. He had accepted the responsibility of collecting five crores of rupees from industrial and business houses for Gandhi Memorial Fund. He gave his services as a trustee of this Fund for many years. He was an advisor in many small and big economic plans. He was the leader of the group of industrialists sent to Russia-Soviet Union in 1954. He had attended as a chief Guest at several conferences at America, Japan and countries of Western Europe and he had represented India in all these conferences.

## **Goal of Life and Its Fulfillment:**

In the last year of his life he had said that he had four wishes: -

- Renovation of Jain temples,
- Modernization of Premabhai Hall (Ahmedabad)
- Establishment of Engineering College at Ahmedabad and
- Research and Protection of old copies of scriptures.

All these four desires of Sheth Kasturbhai were fulfilled during his lifetime and therefore, he felt his life a grand success.

The L.D. Engineering College was established at Ahmedabad in 1945 with the donation of Rs. 25,00,000 from Shri Kasturbhai. He had been President of the well-known Jain firm Anandji Kalyanji and had held its administration for many years. He had done several important works during these years. He handled the question of admission of Harijans- Persons of low community- into Jain temples, dispute of Taranga and the historical disputes over the renovation of Jain holy places at Ranakpur, Delwada, Shetrunjaya and Taranga. He solved all these disputes so well that he has been immortalized with these places of pilgrimage. Thus was not enough. He carefully and personally supervised the renovation of these holy places because these places have been renovated with attractive arts and sculpture. He had obtained marble through his personal influence from the mines

at Danta for the renovation of Jain temples at Delwada. The art of temples at Taranga was covered up from outside. Kasturbhai employed special workers to reopen and renew the artful work. He made several changes to make the temple more attractive. He also got the Jain temples at Girnar, Kumbharia, Dhandhuka and the Jain temple at Shantinath Pole Ahmedabad very well renovated. All these temples were being well administered by the firm Anandji Kalyanji and seeing this very good work, Sir C.P. Ramaswami, President of the Committee for inquiry into religious trusts and reported and recommended that other Hindu Trusts should also follow the management pattern of the firm Anandji Kalyanji.

Sheth Shri Kasturbhai established Lalbhai Dalpatbhai Bharatiya Sanskriti Vidya Mandir opposite the Gujarat University for the development of Bharatiya Prachya Vidya Indian Ancient Studies and research into as well as publication of old copies of Jain scriptures in co-operation with Mooni Shri PunyaVijayaji in 1955 and it was inaugurated by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in 1963. There are at present 45000 hand-written copies of Jain scriptures. There is a grand museum of artistic items received as presents from various institutions of Western India and prominent personalities along with this Vidya Mandir. The new building was put open in 1985. This institute is an important source of inspiration for the Ph.D. students, scholars and learned personalities on Indian culture. When the accredited personality like Dr. Dalsukhbhai Malvania was appointed as Director of this Vidya Mandir, the Gujarat University has approved it for the study of Ph.D. Dr. Malvania is the foremost scholar and intellectual in the subjects of ancient Indian culture. There was total expenditure of about twenty-two lacs for this Vidya Mandir in those days and Sheth Shri Kasturbhai had donated such a big amount through his many Trusts and thereby exhibited his deep love and attachment of ancient Indian culture. This is praise worthy to the utmost.

The work of renovation of Premabhai Hall at Ahmedabad continued for seven-eight years and there was huge expenditure of Rs. 55,70,000 for it. Shri Balkrishna Doshi has planned it with the best of skill and the hall is now considered to be most modern with 975 seats. The Lalbhai Group of Industries has donated Rs. 32,15,000/- for this renovation.

### **Ardent Sponsor of Modern Education:**

Education to suit to this new age is available through Science and Technology. He had already donated two lacs of rupees for the L.D. Arts College in 1929. After this, he established Ahmedabad Education Society in 1935. Shri Anandshankar Bhapubhai Dhruva was its president and Sheth Kasturbhai was the president of the Administrative Committee. It was with the efforts of this committee that Gujarat University was established. For this 100 acres of land was initially Purchased and at a later stage another 525 acres of land was procured. The total cost of this 625 acres of land was seventy lacs rupees. After this, the building of the University was constructed and research institutes were established. There is very great contribution of Sheth Kasturbhai in all these works.

He has made large contributions for the following Institutions, which have now become world-famous:

- Ahmedabad Textile Industries Research Association: This research Institute mainly works for textile. It was established in 1947 and Dr. Vikram Sarabhai was his honorary Director. The magnificent building for this Institution was built in 1954. The scientists themselves now handle the administration and management of this institute.
- Physical Research Laboratory: Dr. Vikram Sarabhai established this Institute in 1948 and Sheth Kasturbhai had give his full co-operation and help in this task.
- Indian Institute of Management.
- School of Architecture
- National Institute of Design

- Dr. Vikram Sarabhai Science Centre.

The wife of Sheth Kasturbhai had sudden ache in her stomach on February 9, 1950. She was admitted to hospital and operated also. But she expired after 2 days. Kasturbhai felt a deep shock of this demise. After this he never stayed at home at Ahmedabad on Diwali days but went to some holy place and thought meditatively for peace.

Last journey: at the age of 86, Kasturbhai had some trouble in speaking and he died at Ahmedabad on July 20, 1980. The news of his passing away spread at electric speed. He was taken for funeral in simple Dhoti and white covering on body. All textile mills remained closed in his honor but his own mills continued to work as usual because this was his last desire. Thousands of people from and beyond India conveyed condolences for this multi-faced personality, fore-seer, liberal, arch up-holder of education unparalleled industrialist, and a dedicated great man. Everybody was sad with his demise.

He had assimilated virtues in his active life. Let these virtues inspire us to make our life an enlightened one.