PRAVIN K SHAH

This is a story of Pravinbhai K Shah, who has changed the face of Pathshala education in the US.

Born in January 1941 in a Ghoghari Jain family in Ahmedabad. From early childhood, he had an internal appreciation for Jain Dharma. He had a Faiba and a Masi in Palitana and many close relatives near Palitana, so he visited Palitana two or three times a year as a youth. That inspired him to take part in 99 yatras at the age of 14. From 6th grade onwards, for eight days of Paryushan, he did Posha (64 Prahari Posha) for the next seven years. He had eight years of Pathshala education and memorized all Panch Pratikaraman sutras.

Pravin’s talent for fine handwriting came to the attention of Guru Bhagvants and they often asked him to write for them and deliver letters and manuscripts for editing to various scholars like Pandit Sukhlalji, Shri Jinvijayji, Shri Punyavijayji, Pandit Bechardas Doshi. This familiarity with such luminaries helped him later in life but more on that later.

Pravin was a student of Mahavira Jain Vidyalaya, Ahmedabad during 1960-61 academic year. He graduated in 1964 from Gujarat University with a degree in Electrical engineering.

From 1964 to 1967 he worked as an assistant lecturer in Electrical Engineering at L. D. Engineering College. During these three years, he was also an NCC officer of EME Unit.

In January 1967 he got married to Artiben and then he came to America in September of that year. He got a master’s degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of Kansas within one year and obtained a job with IBM in Burlington, VT in July 1968. With IBM, he held various technical and management positions and moved from Burlington, VT to Manassas, VA in 1970, and then to Raleigh, NC in 1978. He retired from IBM after 34 years of service in 2002 at Raleigh, NC.

When Gurudev Chitrabhanuji first arrived in the USA in 1972, He attended his Pravachan at the International House in Philadelphia. Artiben knew of Gurudev from her high school days in Bhavnagar and together, they kept in constant touch with him till Gurudev’s passing in early 2019. He also visited Acharya Shri Sushil Muni’s Ashram in 1980 Staten Island in New York and participated in his Ahimsa movement in 1982 at the UN.

In 1975, a retired judge and Pandit Shri Dayabhai C. Mehta visited his daughter Sundaben Bhansali in Manassas VA and stayed about 4 months. He conducted regularly Swadhyay on various aspects of Jainism and where Pravinbhai learned basic philosophy of Jainism.

He gathered all the Jains of greater Raleigh area together and established Jain Study Center of North Carolina (JSCNC) in 1979 which is even today one of the bright stars in the American Jain education activities. He invited Sushil Muni to his hometown in 1980.

The year 1980 was very significant in his spiritual growth. He took leave from his job and considered moving back to India. With his wife Aratiben and two young daughters, Shipa and Shweta reached Ahmedabad. Even got them admitted to a school in Ahmedabad. But after about 8 months, the family returned to the USA. It was not a retreat but was really a blessing in disguise.

During that period, he regularly visited Dr. Soneji – (now Shri Atmaramji) at his residence in Maninagar, Ahmedabad. He received proper spiritual guidance and provided about 15 books to study the basics of Jain philosophy, of Digambar, Shvetambar, Sthanakwasi, and Shrimad traditions.

Back in the US, the daughter’s inquisitiveness about Jainism prompted him to start a Pathshala at home, began teaching in the Pathshala and a whole new journey began.
During the eighties and nineties, JSCNC invited several Jain scholars like Acharya Sushil Muni and Amrendra Muni, Prof Pratap Toliya, Dr. Hukumchand Bharilla, Shri Atmanandji, Gurudev Chitrabhanuji, Acharya Chandanaji, Sadhvi Subhamji, and Vibhaji, Bandhu Tripudi M S, Shri Rupchandji and Manak muni, Shri Dhirajlal Panditji, Smt. Sundaben Vohra, Shri Rammikbhai Savla, and Shri Niraj Jain. They all always stayed at Pravinbhai’s home and he got the benefit of learning Jainism of all different sects from them.

At the JAINA convention in 1991, JAINA created an Education Committee under the leadership of Dr. Premchand Gada. Pravinbhai joined the committee and took the responsibility of teaching Jainism to Pathshala teachers and joined sub-committee to prepare curriculum and the Pathshala books of High school and college-level material.

In 1993, in celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the first “Parliament of world religions” where Shri Virchand Raghavji had planted first Jain flag in the USA, Second World Parliament of Religions was going to be taking place. Sushil Muniji encouraged Pravinbhai to attend 3 days of the conference in Chicago. Dr. Salgia from the USA and Shri Nemu Chandaria from the UK were the conference coordinators. Pravinbhai volunteered to compile all the published literature of Shri V. R. Gandhi for the conference.

Earlier, Pravinbhai had visited Shri V. R. Gandhi’s birthplace Mahuva (Gujarat) and met one of his grandson’s family. They live in the same house where Shri V. R. Gandhi was borne. Looking at their condition, he decided to support the family. He collected Rs 100,000 from Jain attendees at Parliament and send it to the family.

At the parliament, he met many Jain leaders like Dr. Kumarpal Desai and Dr. L M Singhvi and shared his room with Dr. N. P. Jain (Ex-UN ambassador of India). At the parliament, he had delivered a paper on Jain literature that later came to the attention of Shri Naval Firodia Ji who invited him to meet with him during the groundbreaking ceremony of Naval Veerayatan near Pune. There Pravin Bhai met all the trustees of Veerayatan.

In 2000, He became Jaina Education committee chairperson. In the earlier years, under his leadership, his committee enhanced all existing Educational material, printed these books in large quantity and establish distribution a system so that every Jain Pathashala of North America received there required books in time.

In the following years, he started:

- Teachers’ training workshops and Pathshala teachers’ conferences.
- Jain workshop for youth
- Organize Pathshala Education in four major groups (Elementary Level, Middle School Level, High School and College Level and established sub-committees for every level of Educational material.
- Authored and publish the following reference books
  - Basic Introduction of Jainism
  - The essence of World Religions
  - The Book of Compassion
  - English Pratikraman for youth
  - Jain Sutra Books consist of Original Sutra, English translation, Meaning of each sutra
- Ritual Book consist of Ashta Prakari Puja, Mother Trishla’s 14 dreams and Shanti Kalash
- Ashtapad Book

- Education committee sells these books at or below cost and gives them to all scholars and academic students free of charge.

All JAINA education books are non-sectarian and without any copyrights. Presently there are 14 pathshala books, 14 reference books, and 5 Tirtha posters. Complete list of all the pathshala books and reference materials can be obtained from [www.jainelibrary.org](http://www.jainelibrary.org). The soft copy (pdf file) of these books are available free of charge from the same website.

In the year 2003, under Pravinbhai’s leadership, JAINA Education Committee has introduced JAB competition project among students of various pathshalas to test their knowledge about Jainism. In a popular TV game show format, teams from various pathshalas are quizzed vigorously and the winners are rewarded with trophies in what is lovingly called JAB – JAINA Academic Bowl. This competition was designed for Jain students up to the age of 21 years. In 2008, he introduced JAB junior competition for ages 14 years and younger.

To help the students prepare for the competition, there is 400+ pages manual with questions and answers. These competitions take place every two years at the JAINA convention and it is really a jewel in JAINA’s crown. You can justify making a trip to America just to get a chance to witness this pious exercise to sharpen our next generation’s knowledge and dedication to Jainism.

**Establishment of Jain eLibrary**

In order to provide reference material to Pathashala teachers and other academicians, the Education Committee launched and eLibrary project in 2008. The purpose of this project is to present an online library to protect, preserve and disseminate the ancient and contemporary Jain literature.

The Jain eLibrary website is an online collection of Jain scriptures, manuscripts, dictionaries, articles, encyclopedias, magazines and ancient and contemporary Jain books in English, Hindi, Gujarati, and other languages.

*As of 1st January 2019 total 30,00,000 (Thirty Lacks) pages are available and every month 20,000 (Twenty Thousand) new pages are added to this eLibrary.*

While the readers discover the richness and spirituality of our ancient Jain tradition, it also helps the authors and publishers to reach the new audience. **The website is freely accessible to all users. The registered users can download any material from website absolutely without any charges.**

The eLibrary website has 60,000 registered users from 151 countries and as of January 2019, had 24,00,000 visitors and about 900,000 books have been downloaded.

At the age of 80, Pravinbhai has not yet learned how to relax. He arranges many seminars which he himself leads at various jain centers throughout the year, attends conferences internationally and every year, he undertakes a revision of one of the pathshala books as the supply of current stock of that particular book is exhausted and new printing has to be ordered. In the year 2019, he started a discussion blog on the web where contemporary Jain issues are debated.
Embarking on a journey to teach Jain Dharma to his two daughters, Pravinbhai found a mission, a purpose for his life. This is how a journey of educating a whole generation of Jain youth began and he is still thinking of finding new education projects to undertake.

All we can do is to pray that he remains in good health, high spirits and live to be 100 years old. And one more day.