

Contemporary Jain Legend: Shrimad Rajchandra

Part 3

Spiritual Progress

Shrimad did not have a spiritual teacher in his life. At the age of seven, when he was able to recall his past lives, he clearly remembered his association with Bhagwan Mahavir in a previous life.

In 1891 A.D., at the age of 23, Shrimad realized Samyag darshan. He continued to enhance his progress by slowly detaching himself from the material world, deeply studying scriptures, strengthening virtues, refraining from worldly pleasures, and remaining in meditation for longer durations. He started to stay at lonely places outside Mumbai for more than a month at a time. In the beginning, there were many obstacles in his way because he needed to perform his duties as a householder and as a businessman.

From 1896 A.D., he often spent several months in isolation in the woods of Uttarsandaa, Idar, and Kavithaa, where he would eat only one meal during the day and sleep very little. He spent his time in deep meditation and attained a highly enlightened state of self-realization at the age of 28.

He retired totally from business in 1899 at the age of 31 and requested that his mother permit him to renounce the worldly life permanently and become a monk. Unfortunately, his mother denied him out of love and affection.

However, after two years of clever persuasion, he was hopeful of his mother's permission, but by this time his health had deteriorated. and he could not recover. He died in 1901 A.D. in Rajkot at the very young age of thirty-three.

Followers

Though Shrimad tried to keep his spiritual personality completely private, several people accepted him as their guide to achieve ultimate liberation and devoted their lives to him. Some of his closest followers were:

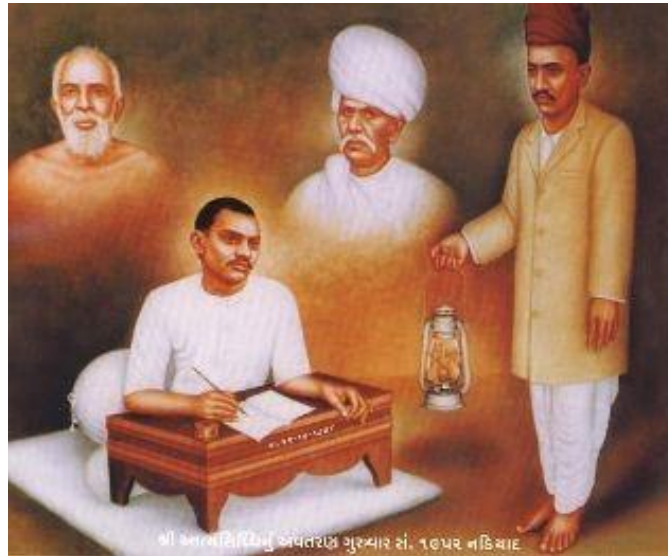
- **Shri Sobhagbhai**

Almost 350 of the 950 letters of Shrimad Raajchandra were written to Shri Sobhagbhai, who was about 40 years older than him. In the very first meeting, Sobhagbhai recognized Shrimad as a highly self-realized person and accepted him as his true guru. He was simple in his behavior and serious devotion. He was a native of Sailaa, a town near Rajkot. Based on his request, Shrimad composed the epic poem "Aatmasiddhi- shastra" so that it would be easier to memorize. Shri Sobhagbhai attained self-realization and died in deep meditation (samadhi).

- **Shri Laghuraaj Swami**

Shri Laghuraaj Swami was a Sthaanakvaasi Jain monk and one of the most devoted disciples of Shrimad. As a monk, his devotion to Shrimad caused him great problems from the Jain community.

Shri Laghuraaj Swami attained self-realization during Shrimad's presence and then established the Agaas Ashram near Vadodara. The ashram can take credit for preserving Shrimad's writings and making it available to the Jain community at large. Agaas is an important place for Shrimad's followers. Today there are more than fifty ashrams in India and abroad where the followers worship and study Shrimad's literature based on the divine faith and testimony provided by Shri Laghuraaj Swami.



Shrimad Raajchandra writing Atmasiddhi-shastra

(On left Shri Laghraaj Swami, Shri Sobhagbhai and Shri Ambalalbhai with Lantern)

- **Shri Ambalalbhai**

Ambalalbhai, a native of Khambhaat, was a very devoted disciple who sacrificed a brilliant legal career to be in the service of Shrimad. Shrimad entrusted him to copy scriptural works and his letters because of his exceptional memory. He and Shrimad's younger brother, Mansukhbhai, were responsible for recovering Shrimad's letters and writings and publishing them. Four years after Shrimad, in 1905 A.D., Ambalalbhai attained self-realization and passed away in deep samadhi at a very young age.

- **Shri Joothabhai**

Joothabhai was the first person to recognize Shrimad's divinity and accept him as his spiritual mentor. Their relationship was very close, but also very short as Shri Joothabhai passed away when he was only 23 years old in 1890 A.D.

Teachings and Contribution of Shrimad Raajchandra

All of Shrimad's literature is based on Bhagawan Mahaavir's teachings. He presented these teachings in simple Gujarati and Hindi in both prose and poetry forms. As we study Shrimad's writings in-depth, we find that he made an enormous effort to shed new light on true spirituality. He succeeded in reforming blind faith with real spiritual awakening.

His biggest contribution is to point out the mistakes most people make in following a teacher based on external conduct and dress code. The spiritual journey led by a wrong teacher leads the disciple to extended life cycles of misery and pain. On the other hand, when an aspirant is able to know and follow the teachings of a true teacher (sadguru), he will be able to attain true freedom and liberation.

- **Morality:**

Good manners, good activities, and good behavior are the roots of holiness. All living beings are seen as equal. Therefore, do not cause pain to any soul, nor extort work from any soul beyond their ability and capacity.

- **Human life:**

All living beings long for permanent happiness, and there is no exception to this. This desire can be fulfilled only in human life. Yet human beings choose unhappiness. This is due to his illusionary state (Mohaniya karma - Mithyaatva) in which he sees happiness in worldly desires and possessions.

- **Non-attachment to Worldly Affairs (Vairaagya):**

Detachment from worldly and materialistic affairs and family relationships is defined as Vairaagya, and achieving it is essential for eternal happiness. True renunciation is always followed by the true knowledge of the self or the soul. Without true renunciation, a person will not be able to gain true knowledge of the soul. If one stops only at the stage of renunciation and there is no desire for true knowledge, his/her human life would be in vain.

- **Knowledge and Wisdom:**

Through proper knowledge, we are able to know the forms and qualities of the substances of the universe. The Jain scripture, Uttaraadhyayan Sutra, indicates that "Knowledge is like a needle with a thread. Just like a needle with a thread in it does not get lost, a person with knowledge will not lose the right religious path in this world." It is the true knowledge with which an external feeling is controlled, attachment for life, family, and worldly pleasures is decreased, and the truth is revealed. If you know yourself, you know the whole world. If you do not know yourself, your knowledge is worthless.