

Shri Virchand R. Gandhi's Literature

Shri Virchand Gandhi was a brilliant scholar of Jainism and a great exponent of Indian culture. His speeches at the first parliament of world religion conference in Chicago echoed the true spirit of Jainism and true culture of India. He spoke as a Jain but forcefully defended Hinduism from the attack of Westerners at the Parliament. Above all, he was first Indian then Jain.

Shri Virchand R. Gandhi was born in 1864 at Mahuva, Gujarat, in India. He graduated with honors from the University of Bombay in 1884. He mastered fourteen languages and at the age of 21, he became the first honorary secretary of the Jain Association of India. Later he qualified as a Barrister in London but he did not use this qualification for monetary gain. He died at the young age of 37 in 1901.

He was the only the Jain representing Jainism at the first parliament of world religion held in Chicago in 1893. After the conference he stayed about two years in the USA and delivered more than 535 lectures on Jainism, Yoga, Indian systems of philosophy, Indian culture, occultism, and spiritualism at various institutions.

Virchand Gandhi talked about the doctrines of Jainism in such a coherent manner that some newspapers published the text of his lectures in full. He had a most effective way of handling the otherwise difficult terminology of Jainism. He had an extraordinary ability to clarify his statements in a consistent and logical manner. At the conference, he made a brief but striking presentation on the fundamentals of the Jain religion. He expounded the main aspect of the Jain religion namely: Jain philosophy, Jain way of life, and Jain code of conduct.

The following is the list of publications that summarizes his lectures and articles that were compiled and published either by him or by others after his death.

1. *The Jaina Philosophy*

His lectures on Jain philosophy, logic, and anekantwad have been published in a book named 'The Jaina Philosophy'. The book was compiled by Shri Bhagu F. Karbhari and published by Shri Agamodaya Samit, Bombay in 1910. In these lectures he made the Jaina positions comprehensible to a non-Jain and non-Indian audience. His approach was most non-sectarian and rational. He explained the following basic topics of Jainism in his lectures;

Shaddravaya	Six substances of the universe
Navatatva	Nine principles covering philosophy of karma and path of liberation
Chargati	Four states of existence
Panchavrata	Five great and small vows of conduct
Moksha	Ultimate state of soul when liberated from karma
Nyayavad	Assertion of truth from a particular point of view
Anekanthavad	Principle of Jain Philosophy, which explains that truth should be viewed from all different point of views.

2. *The Karma Philosophy*

His lectures on the Jaina theory of Karma have also been published in a book 'The Karma Philosophy'. The book was compiled by Shri Bhagu F. Karbhari and published by Shri Agamodaya Samit, Bombay in 1913. All Indian religions agree that each action entails its fruit or its result; none can escape the consequences of one's own actions. This fundamental idea on which the doctrine of Karma is based holds crucial importance in the development of ethical thoughts of ancient Indians. The Jaina version of it is illuminating in more ways than one.

V. Glasenapp, a well-known German scholar on Jainism, wrote his doctoral dissertation on the Jain doctrine of Karma; and acknowledged Gandhi's lectures as his sole influence. Even today, these lectures remain unsurpassed and serve as an independent source of enlightenment on the subject.

3. The Systems of Indian Philosophy

His lectures on the various systems of Indian philosophy have been compiled by Shri K. K. Dixit and published under the title 'The Systems of Indian Philosophy' by Shri Mahavira Jaina Vidyalaya, Bombay in 1970. It explains the various Indian philosophies, which are Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya (Vaisesika), Mimamsa, Vedanta, Buddhism, and Jainism.

These lectures bear testimony of his powers of comprehension, his philosophical acumen and his profound learning. He is particularly conscious of the fact that the true strength of India lies in what is moral and spiritual in Indians. He draws no distinction among Brahmanic (Hindu), Jain, or Buddhist cultures. According to him, the basic Indian culture is neither Hindu, nor Jain nor Buddhist. By giving an impressive account of Indian life, he draws a true picture of the social and moral status of ancient Indians.

4. Yoga Philosophy

His lectures on the various aspect of yoga have been compiled by Shri Bhagu F. Karbhari and published by Shri Agamodaya Samit, Bombay in 1912. His exposition of Yoga philosophy and its technique of eight-fold yoga to achieve the suppression of the manifestations of mind entailing the unagitated pure state of mind, is brilliant. He aptly discusses the interesting topic of miraculous powers, which a yogi acquires by reason of performing the highest form of concentration on the required event, aspect, or thing.

The source of the positive power lies in the soul. The very wording of the definition of yoga involves the supposition of the existence of a power which can control and suppress the manifestations of the mind.

5. Essay - "Radva Kutvani Hanikarak Chal"

Shri Virchand Gandhi was a great social reformer at a very young age. He wrote a 37 page long essay "Radva Kutvani Hanikarak Chal" (crying and breast-beating by a widow or other women relatives after a death of a person) against social evils at the young age of 22. When his father died in 1890, he did not allow the primitive practices of wailing and breast-beating during mourning. He continuously fought against social evils and was successful in eradicating some.

6. The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ

Shri Virchand Gandhi wrote this book by translating an ancient manuscript. The book was published in India in 1894 while he was in Chicago.

7. Savirya-dhyan

Shri Virchand Gandhi translated the first two chapters of the original text "Jnanarnav" written by Acharya Shri Shubhachandra. The translation was published in the book called Savirya-dhyan in 1903.

8. Concentration

This small book consisting of 64 pages was first published in 1916. It contains a summary of Shri Virchand Gandhi's 12 lectures on meditation according to Jain tradition. He describes that the need of meditation is to attain mental peace and to rise above feelings of worry and anxiety. Next he explains the basic rule governing the practice of meditation.

It can be said that Gandhi was a formidable champion of Jain philosophy, a brilliant exponent of the systems of Indian philosophy, and a fervent lover of Indian culture. He was a most astounding scholar with a versatile personality combined with a catholicity of outlook. Various publishers republished most of his literature in 1993 on the occasion of the 2nd parliament of world religion conference.