

THE GREAT AND BRIGHT SUN OF TERĀPANTHA : ĀCĀRYA BHIKSHU

- Prof. (Dr.) Sohan Raj Tater
Former Vice Chancellor, Singhania University

Origin of Terāpanth

The emergence and rise of Ācārya Bhishu in the history of Jain religion is no less than a phenomenon. He was born in the Vikrama samvata 1783. In v.s. 1808, he took initiation as a monk in Sthānakavāsīsect founded Terāpantha in v.s. 1817 and left for his heavenly abode in v.s. 1860. The picture that he has drawn of his period of vikrama's 19th century resembles 8-9th Vikrama's century of Haribhadrasuri. He has given the account of laxity in monk's life like this :

1. The spirit of renunciation is decreasing. The workload of an elephant has been put on the backs of asses. They are exhausted and have thrown away that burden.¹
2. The monks of today live in dwellings already built.
3. The monks are concerned only with making disciples—male and female. They are concerned only with running the sect and not about real monkhood.
4. They buy books, papers and hermitages.
5. They go for begging alms at feasts.
6. They are always slandering others.
7. They take delicious food in quantity greater than that has been prescribed for monks.
8. They make the householders promise to come to them only and not to anybody else when they want to get initiated.
9. They possess more clothes than the ones that have been prescribed for the monks.
10. They buy disciples.

11. They send news through householders.
12. They do not transcript books.
13. They try to stop by hook or by crook the votaries who want to go to monks. They sow the seeds of internecine quarrel in their families.²

These ideas and conducts brought immediate reaction and Terāpantha is the result of the same. Terāpantha begins from the full-moon day of the month of Āṣāḍha of the v.s. 1817. It was the day when Ācārya Bhikshu took vows anew. Thus Terāpantha was founded in a very natural way along with his initiation. In 19th century of Vikrama one more change occurred in the mentality of the monks. The order turned to laxity in 19th century of Vikrama as they came to think like this, "this is the period of penury. It is the fifth ārā of kalikāla (Avasarpīni kāla) the strict rules of monkhood cannot be observed at this time."³

According to the history of Śvetāmbara sect, Terāpantha was founded in V.S. 1817 on the full-moon day of the month of Āṣāḍha. Ācārya Bhikshu was its founder. He was initiated in the sect of Sthānakavāsī (that had started in the convention of Lomkāśāha) in v.s. 1808 and got separated from it in v.s. 1816. In his opinion, the sect at that time had been beset by the gross laxity in character. When Ācārya Bhikshu studied Āgamas, he felt that the conduct of the monks did not correspond to Āgamas and that the theoretical aspect too was contrary to them. Neither Ācārya Rughnath nor Bhikshu himself had ever thought that a new sect would be born in Jain tradition. This was not a dispute of gurudom or pupilage. Had Bhikshu not thought of Rughnathji as his guru and had he not regarded himself as his disciple, he would have thought of founding another sect. But why did he think so? He had great affection and regard for Rughnathji. Ācārya Rughnathji was a great leader of a big sect. Bhikshu was regarded as his successor. Then why should have he ever thought of getting separated from him? Bhikshu had no ill-will in his heart. He was feeling extremely uneasy only because he

wanted to bring about purification of conduct.⁴ This was his aim and only to achieve it, he got separated, with a heavy heart, from his guru.

The Devotion of Ācārya Bhikshu :

Someone asked Ācārya Bhikshu, "O Lord! your path is extremely restrained and disciplined. How long will it go like this?" Ācārya Bhikshu said, "This path will go on so long as the monks and nuns following it are firm in reverence, faith and conduct, do not violate the limits set regarding clothes and pots and do not reside in building constructed for them." Ācārya Bhikshu said, **"A being lives, this is not non-violence or mercy. Someone dies, this is not violence. The tendency to kill is violence and to control this instinct, this tendency, is non-violence."** Yogīrāja kṛiṣṇa had said, "The soul that is united with yoga, that is even-eyed at all places and in all circumstances, finds his own soul in all the beings and all the beings in his own soul." This was the lively devotion of Bhikshu, **"One, who keeps oneself away from violence, be it day or night, be one alone or in the company of others, be one asleep or awake, is a spiritual being and the mentality of remaining away from violence is spiritualism"**. This was the basis of the devotion of Ācārya Bhikshu.

Someone came to Ācārya Bhikshu when he was at Udaipur and said to him, "Ask me some question regarding reality of universe." Ācārya Bhikshu did not ask any question. When he asked him many times, "Ācārya Bhikshu said, "Are you with mind or without mind?" The man said, "I am with mind." Acharya Bhikshu said, "How can you say that you are with mind?" The man said, "No, I am not with mind. I am without mind," Acharya Bhikshu said, "From what point of view are you without mind?" The man got confused. He said, "I am neither with mind nor without mind." Acharya Bhikshu then asked him, "On what ground can you say that?" The man got angry. He struck a blow on the chest of Ācārya Bhikshu and went away from there.⁵ Acharya Bhikshu bore away this humiliation with equanimity. Such was the supreme devotion of Ācārya Bhikshu.

Once Ācārya Bhikshu said to Bharimalji, his favourite disciple, "If someone pointed out some shortcomings in you, you will have to observe Telā (fast for three days) for every shortcoming." Accepting his command, Bharimalji said, "O Gurudeva, what should I do if someone points out some faults falsely?" Ācārya Bhikshu said, "In any case you will have to observe fast for three days. If someone points out a real shortcoming, and you observe a fast, it will be a sort of atonement. And if someone points out a fault falsely, and you observe a fast, take it to be a result of your karmas (deeds) earned by you in past." Bharimalji gladly obeyed his guru's command. This thing could not have been possible by arguing.⁶

The devotion of Ācārya Bhikshu was vital because he was extremely vigilant regarding discipline. Once it so happened that he called for muni Veniramji. He did not get any reply. He got no response even after calling two or three times. Upon this, Ācārya Bhikshu said to Gumanji Lunawat, "It seems veniram will be separated from the order." Gumanji got up immediately, went to the shop that was there in the front and where veniramji had gone and told him what Ācārya Bhikshu had said, Veniramji at once came to Ācārya Bhikshu and paid him respect. The Ācārya asked him, "Why don't you obey even after being called in?" Veniramji said, "I beg your pardon, sir, but I did not hear you" Ācārya Bhikshu was pleased with his politeness, but this incidence was a lesson to all the monks for obeying discipline. Munsarai Marudnat, the famous Tamil poet has said, "Giving authority to someone who has a lot of wealth but does not have true restraint is like giving a flame to a monkey."⁷ That the flame burns neither someone else nor flame holder can be possible only when it is in the hand of a capable person." Being a monk and being unrestrained are two extremely contradictory situations :

aṁkuśa ke binā jaise hāthi calatā hai.

lagāma ke binā jaise ghoṅā calatā hai.

Vaise hi saṁyama ke binā kuguru calatā hai.

Vaha kevala kahane ke liye sādhu hai.

As an elephant cannot go the right way without an iron goad and a horse cannot be controlled without a rein, in the same way a guru without restraint cannot be said to be a good and true guru. He is a 'guru' only in name.

Ācārya Bhikshu regarded discipline an indispensable part of devotion. He was very careful about self-discipline and he wanted others also to maintain discipline.

Tenets of Acharya Bhikshu :

Given below are the tenets of Ācārya Bhikshu :

1. Many people say that one cannot perform religion without killing beings. It is believed by some people is that it is not a sin if beings are killed when good emotions are there in mind. But how can the emotions be good if beings are killed deliberately and knowingly?
2. Where there is compassion the principle "There can be no religion without killing beings does not hold good."
3. Beings are killed; this is the weakness of someone but to give it the form of religion, "There can be no religion without committing violence", is absolutely wrong.
4. **To save one being by killing another being is not religion. True religion lies in bringing about an unrighteous person to being righteous.**
5. Nurturing beings by killing other beings is only a worldly way. Those who find truth and religion in this belief are stupid and ignorant.
6. Many people say, "One incurs both sin and religion if one kills beings with a feeling of compassion for them." But the fact is that one cannot have virtue by doing sin and sin by doing virtue. Both cannot be done in single action.
7. The natures of sin and merit are different.

8. Using non-restraint, getting it used by others and to recommend the use of non-restraint is a sin.
9. Using restraint, causing others to use it and to recommend the use of restraint is a religion.
10. A person having right faith regards the worldly way and unworldly way to be different.
11. Religion lies in renunciation, not in enjoyment.
12. Religion lies in the change of heart, not in force.
13. To wish that an unrestrained fellow should live long is an attachment.
14. To wish that such fellow should die is aversion.
15. To wish that such fellow should become restrained is religion.

Both the life and death of those who are well stabilized in penances and rules are good. While they live, they earn virtues and in death, they get enviable position. On the contrary, neither life nor death of those who commit sins is good. While they live, they develop hostility and when they die, they fall into darkness. Practical wisdom does not regard violence that is unavoidable as sin. Hence practical wisdom seconds such violence committed in reality and considers it to be a pure merit. But this thinking is an incomplete truth. **Violence in any condition is violence and every kind of violence is a sin.** The goal may be good but if the means are bad and unfair, they will either spoil the goal or turn it to a wrong direction. Thus goal and means are very closely related. They cannot be separated from each other.⁸

Charity is a social issue. The fact that there is no room for it in the present social structure, it has been socially accepted. Now we talk of 'co-operation' instead of 'charity'. In this world only a true sanyāsī has the right to accept alms without doing any manual labour. The monk who is deeply devoted to God has this right. Once it so happened that Ācārya Bhikshu came across some people of Ghanerao. They asked him, "Who are you?"

Ācārya Bhikshu said, "I am Bhikan". Hearing his name, they got angry and exclaimed, "How bad! A great misfortune has be fallen on us." Ācārya Bhikshu asked, "How so?" They said, "One who sees your face goes to hell." Ācārya Bhikshu then asked, "Does someone who sees your face go to heaven?" The people nodded their heads in consent. Then Ācārya Bhikshu replied, "Then it was not good for you, but it was good for me. I shall go to heaven as I have seen your faces."

Ācārya Bhikshu says, "To commit violence is a sin, to get it committed is a sin and to second it is a sin too." Compassion and charity are found where no violence of any kind is committed. Compassion and charity are the ways to salvation. The Lord has considered these very elements as recommended by religion. This is his language of total devotion—"O Lord! you have described right faith, right knowledge, right conduct and right penance to be the ways to attain salvation. I know no element other than these ones. I regard Arihanta as God, the unattached one as my guru and the way shown by you as religion. To me, everything else is a share of illusions. To me, your command is the supreme evidence." Ācārya Bhikshu had great faith in Jain religion but he did not take it in a narrow sense. He says, "The way to God is a high way. It is not a narrow lane, which may be lost in between. It is the way that leads straight to salvation."⁹

He believed that religion is one, by firmly supporting the principle that nonviolent activity of wrong faithed fellow is also religion, he has rendered the broad outlook of Jain tradition extremely impressive. With his clear views the delusive belief that one gets religion only by following a particular sect was automatically contradicted. He deeply felt that religion and sect is not one and the same thing. He said, "Non-violent activity is religion, be it be performed by a Jain or someone other than a Jain. Violence activity is not religion; it does not matter whether it is performed by a Jain or someone other than a Jain." Ācārya Bhikshu said, "The religion of the Lord is vast like the ocean and broad like the sky. The religion that is pure, eternal and universal, has been expatiated by the Lord, can be expressed in one

word and that is 'Non-violence'." The Lord said, "Do not kill vitality, living beings, beings and isness. Do not rule over them; do not make them subservient by enslaving them. Do not trouble and disturb them. Only this religion is permanent, eternal and universal. In the reign of Jina, only the service of the sick is the real thing. One who serves the sick, attains salvation.

We get husk with wheat, but wheat is not sown to get husk. Merit is always there with religion, but religion is not observed for merit. One who desires merit, get the bond of demerit.¹⁰ We cannot apply the medicine meant for tongue to eye and similarly we cannot apply the medicine meant for eye to tongue. If we do so, both eye and tongue will be harmed. In the same way, one who combines the function of demerit with merit and vice-versa, gets himself bonded both ways.

Ethical proprieties of Ācārya Bhikshu :

Ācārya Bhikshu wrote that one, desirous of getting initiated, should be initiated after he has been completely taught the nine elements. He always remained vigilant throughout his life. Even in his last sermon, he said, "Do not initiate every rag-tag (undesirable person) into the order. Take great care while initiating someone. Thus, he strengthened the role of discipline by imposing strict restriction on the initiation of incapable and undesirable persons. He wrote, "If a monk is not able to understand anything regarding conduct, faith, reverence, clue or any sort of propriety, he should follow what the Ācārya or a learned monk says. If he is not able to grasp even after their explaining the matter, he should leave it to the omniscient. But under no circumstance should he try to confuse or befool other monks." Ācārya Bhikshu regards the Ācārya to be the final authority but he has given proper importance to scripture-proficient and learned monks also. He writes, "If there need be to find out whether some subject is authentic or not, the scripture-proficient and well-read monks should also be consulted."¹¹

Ācārya Bhikshu said. " If someone points out some fault in some body after a long time, it is he who deserves atonement. One, who has committed

a mistake, he must atone for it, if he remembers one's mistake." How can one, who points out a mistake or fault after a long time, be believed? Only the learned people will know if he is right; but in practice, he cannot be believed." One, who accumulates faults, is a supporter of injustice. How can such a person, who hides the defects when there is affection between them and exposes those defects when there is no affection between them. How he can be trusted? Doing so is contrary to wisdom.

Ācārya Bhikshu felt that there are hardly any monks in small village where as big towns are full of them. The monks are thinking more of their comforts and conveniences than on doing good to others. He said, "All the monks and nuns will move from one place to the other and decide where to spend the four months of rainy season with the permission of Bharmalji (the present Ācārya). No one will do so without his permission."¹²

Ācārya Bhikshu left for his heavenly abode on the 13th day of the Bhādavā Sudi month in Vikrama saṁvata 1960. All of us are deeply indebted to him and pay our heart-felt respect to him.

References :

¹ Ācāra kī chaupāī, 6.28

² Ibid, 5.33-34.

³ Bhikshu Jaśa Pasāyaṇa-2, Couplets 15-16.

⁴ Ibid-4, Couplets 11-13.

⁵ Gītā, 6/29.

⁶ Bhikshu Jaśa Pasāyaṇa 11, 6-10.

⁷ Tima sāhitya aura saṁskṛiti, p. 86.

⁸ Sarvodaya kā siddhānta, p. 13.

⁹ Ācārya santa bhikhanji, p. 85.

¹⁰ Nava padārtha, puṇya padārtha, 1.52.

¹¹ Likhita, 1832.

¹² Ibid, 1859.

¹³ Bhikshu vicāra darśana, Ācārya Mahāprajña, Adarsh Sahitya Sangh, Churu (Raj.), edition 2000.