

Shrimad Rajchandra and Atma-siddhi Shastra

-Vinod Kapashi

Shrimad Rajchandra who lived during the later part of the last century was a great philosopher and a unique shravaka who practiced and preached the true ideals of the Jain faith. Though he was not a monk in the usual sense, his life and practice of religion, philosophy and spiritual achievements were no less important than those of any great monk. Without advocating any sectarian view, he preached the philosophy of soul and its attributes. Shrimad Rajchandra was a great poet too and the subject matter of my speech to-day is one of the most famous poems called Atma-Siddhi Shastra- The scripture of attaining the salvation of one's own soul.

Shrimad Rajchandra was born on 9th November 1867 in a small village (called Vavana) in the state of Gujarat. His father's name was Ravjibhai and mother's name was Devabai. He was named Raichand when he was four year old. His grandfather was a staunch devotee of Lord Krishna. His mother grew up in Jain religious traditions.

Shrimad writes in one of his books : "In this apparently short span of life, I have experienced much about the soul, the nature of mind, the speech, the physical body, the wealth... many worldly ups and downs and the causes of interminable misery and unhappiness. I had no attachment to wearing clean clothes, selection of good food, good bed, etc. ..For four years, from seven to eleven, I devoted myself to study. At that time I remembered all what I once saw or read. My recollection was faultless, as my mind was sinless.

Initially Shrimad hated the Jains who did not accept God as the creator of the world. But he gradually read the Jain sacred books such as Pratikramana Sutra and understood the Jain philosophy in its right context.

Shrimad possessed the knowledge of his previous births. It is called *Jati Smarana Jnana*. Shrimad says in his own words:- "Once when I was seven years old, an elderly neighbour called Amichand suddenly died of a snake bite. I did not know what was death. I asked my grandfather but he did not give a proper reply. Rajchandra then went to the cremation ground, climbed a tree and saw the whole process of burning the deceased body. He started thinking about the nature of death and there and then recollected his previous lives which is known as *Jati Smarana Jnana*.

At the tender age of 16, Shrimad composed a book called *Moksh mala* containing 108 short lessons. This book is also read by thousands of people in regular gatherings. This book was first published in 1887 when Shrimad Rajchandra was 20 years old. He has written scores of poems and his letters to various people including some letters to Mahatma Gandhi are very famous and big source of inspiration to all the readers now.

Shrimad had a sharp memory and greater understanding of the scriptural knowledge. He could understand and memorise books in a very short time. His

power of remembrance developed further and he managed to do hundred *avdhan* (paying attention in hundred different things simultaneously) This extra ordinary power was due to his supernormal capabilities. He gave a public performance of this extra ordinary capacity in a packed auditorium in Bombay. This was witnessed by the then British Officers and some journalists. Although he could perform the hundred *avadhan* when he was only 19 years old, Shrimad gave up this practice because, as he said this was not going to help him in his spiritual quest. He did not care for fame or money that might have earned from this *avadhans*. His goal and destiny were certainly different.

Shrimad had studied all the Jain scriptures and many great books written by Jain Acharyas. The back ground to his philosophy of six steps lie in one particular verse in a book called *Adhyatma-saar* by Yashovijay suri.

The poet Yashovijayji says-

*Nasti, na nityo, na karta
na bhokta na cha nivrutah
Tadupayascha netyaahuh
mithyatvasya padani sat.*

Which means '(To believe that) There is no soul, it is not eternal, it is not the author, it is not the sufferer, there is no liberation and there is no path to achieve the salvation are the six steps of faithlessness.

One can see that Shrimad Rajchandra has very scholarly written them in a positive way to say what are the six statements of enlightened faith which leads to Self-knowledge.

The first century acharya Kundkunda had also mentioned about the soul in a slightly different manner but he had said “- Soul does good or bad actions and enjoys (or suffers from) the fruits of them”. Shrimad has also said this same thing in his 3rd and 4th statements.

Another great Jain monk Nemichandra says in his *Dravya-Samgraha*

“Soul lives....is immaterial, doer,...enjoyer and fixed in mundane existence and liberated....”

It is therefore clear that Shrimad was very much influenced by these books and the idea of soul as propagated in those books.

The idea mentioned above was treated briefly in few of Shrimad's letters-

The first letter about this was written to Lalluji in Vikram Samvat 1950 ie in AD 1893. This letter is briefly explained by me here. The second important letter mentioning the six steps was written to Mahatma Gandhi when Gandhi was in Durban, South Africa. This letter is dated Fagan Vad 5, 1951. ie it was written in AD 1894. In that letter Shrimad has clearly mentioned all six steps which have been explained in the poem *Atma-Siddhi Shastra*.

First let us see the background of the first letter.

Shri Lalluji Maharaj, one of the admirer of Shrimad was very sick and asked Shrimad about the ritual death as per the Jain tenets. In reply, Shrimad wrote the famous letter of six fundamental truths, and inspired Lalluji Maharaj not to fear death.

This letter is the theme, of which "Atmasiddhi" is the development. Shri Lalluji Maharaj appreciates this letter as follows:

"This letter has helped us to remove all our stray ideas and wandering thoughts, it has removed our doubts, confirmed our faith in the fundamentals of Jainism and those of all religions in general, namely the nature and development of soul.

It has taken us out of our prejudicial attachments to the Jain sects; it has kept us clear of fixing our faith in the Vedanta; it has, in brief, re-established our pursuits in the nature of the Self and its knowledge.

Thus, this letter is uniquely wonderful in many ways. If the disciple is deserving, if he constantly meditates on this letter, on the truths contained in it, would put him to the path of Self-realisation."

Letter goes like this-

LETTER OF SIX FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS

Bombay Falguna, Vikram Samvat 1950

Salutations with extreme devotion to Shree Sadgurudeva, the sole giver of protection.

The knowing saints who have realised their pure self have declared the following six steps as the best abodes of Samyaka Darshana or right vision of reality:

Step One:

'Self exists.' As there are objects such as pots and pans and our cloths, so there is the Self. As one can prove the existence of an object by its specific quality or characteristic, the proof of the existence of Self can be proved by the presence in it of a quality of consciousness, which not only illuminates itself but also all others around it.

Step Two:

'This Self is permanent or eternal', Pot/pans and cloth etc. exist only for some time, but the Self is present in all times, past, present and future. Pots and pans and clothing etc. are objects made up of atoms joined by combination of circumstances, the Self is by nature an independent existence or a substance because we do not experience any circumstances which can create it. Consciousness cannot manifest itself by the help of any object created by circumstances. So it is not created. Since it does not involve any combination of objects, it is imperishable. Because that which cannot be brought into existence

by any combination of circumstances, cannot merge or disappear by its transformation to anything else. In short that which is never created, is never destroyed.

Step Three:

'Self is the author of its actions.' All objects have meaning and are active, they are always found to be affected by something else and in their turn, they affect something else in their contact i.e. they are subject to the law of cause and effect. Self is also affecting something i.e. it is active and so it is the creator of its actions.

Step Four:

'Self is the enjoyer, or sufferer of its actions or deeds.' Whatever activity it may be, it is always bringing some results, sooner or later. Direct experience proves that every act done by its author, makes him enjoy or suffer its consequence. Take poison and die, take sugar and feel its sweetness in the mouth, touch fire and suffer the burns, touch snow and feel cold- thus every action is connected with its results or consequence and there is no exception to this rule. Thus the Self being the author of its activities, has to suffer the results of these activities.

Step Five:

There is liberation. We are now to show that the actions done, can also be destroyed because in direct experience there may be strong effect of passions etc. but by not repeating it, by not establishing any contact with it, by quietening it down, it can be gradually destroyed. When the Jiva or Soul gets free from all bondage, it enjoys liberation. Thus freedom from all binding actions of the Soul is known as Soul's liberation or Moksha.

Step Six:

'There is a method of obtaining liberation from bondage of Karma or actions.' If Karma bondage goes on happening and increasing, then release from it, can never occur, but things or means possessing a quite opposite nature than that of binding actions, are available in direct experience and they are knowledge, vision or perception, Samadhi or Yogic concentration, non-attachment, devotion etc., by employing which means, Karma bondage slackens down, it quietens very much, it gets reduced and in the end, totally removed or destroyed. Therefore knowledge, vision or perception, sense-control, non-attachment etc. are surely the available means for liberation.

Shrimad says "Here I have briefly shown these six steps shown by all-knowing saints-the steps which are the principal residence of enlightened vision. These six steps are totally true or correct, beyond all possible doubt, and this is preached by the very high person Lord Mahavira.

Thinking this way one can find purity, perfection, indestructibility or imperishability, highest joy and freedom from all conflicting nature of worldly matters.

Our Salutations with all devotion to those great saintly persons who have preached this path of leading an ordinary person to its original nature and powers, by destroying the bondages in the form of birth, old age and death. Our Self-nature shines out even by constantly daily remembering his compassion. Let the lotus feet of such great saints remain firmly fixed in our hearts!

I have no power to define the virtue of that great saint who told these six steps by which the real nature of the Self is proved and immediately it shines out in the jiva by accepting these six steps and by manifestation of the Self's real nature the Jiva feels joy for all times and becomes totally free from all fears.

I again offer my salutations with all devotion to that All knowing Saint who obliged us with this Soul

The great saints have advised devotion to Sadguru-right preceptor, purely for the highest good of their disciples; when such a devotion turns into a life's mission, the devotee's mind constantly remain in the activities of the Self of that Sadguru or right preceptor and he clearly sees unprecedented virtuous qualities in the Sadguru and thereby all other unthinking or ignorant behaviour remains no more and his self-knowledge immediately shines out and knowing this, the high type of devotion is advised by the great saints. Therefore my repeated salutations for all time to such devotion and to the advisors of such devotion, namely the great saints!

Based on above letter Shrimad wrote out his famous 'Atma Siddhi' in the form of a poetic dialogue in 142 verses, at the suggestion and request of Sobhagyabhai.

One of Shrimad's admirers Ambalal stood with a Lentern in his hand while the composition was written. In this composition Shrimad has explained the gist of Jainism and of all true religion namely the six fundamental truths.

They are- The soul exists, that it is eternal, that it is the author of its activities, that therefore it is responsible for the results of its activities, that it aspires for liberation and that this is achieved by following a right kind of religion.

This concise and accurate composition is a masterpiece in philosophical literature. The author has, in a simple form of question and answer, explained the gist of Jainism

Shrimad instructed Ambalal to make out four copies of the manuscript and give one copy each, to his close and deserving disciples.

Shrimad starts the poem with a beautiful verse-

*Je swarup samjya vina, pamyo dukha ananta
samjavyu te pada namu shri sadguru bhagvant. (1)*

=I have suffered eternal pain because I have never understood the true nature of my self (my form and my soul). I bow to my true master who has preached and explained me the real-self.

Shri Brahmachariji translates this verse in a following manner–

1. 1. As real self I never knew, so suffered I eternal pain,

I bow to Him my master true, Who preached and broke eternal chain.

In the first 44 verses the subject is introduced- The truth that without self-knowledge, the worldly pains cannot be completely removed. The adherence to the path of sacrificial rituals and the theoretical path of gaining knowledge for the sake of knowledge are not the natures of the soul. This is far reaching precept. It embraces the self and non-self, soul and the non-soul, the living and the non-living. Its subject matter includes substances with all their infinite of qualities and conditions, of attributes and modifications.

Shrimad says that although self knowledge is extinct in this day and age but here it is explained for the true seekers. The first thing now is to seek for a true guru. But what are the characteristics of such seekers and what are the characteristics of true Guru?

There are some people who are engaged in pursuing the path of rituals whereas there are some who think that the only path is the path of obtaining scriptural knowledge.

In the sixth stanza Shrimad says-

Vairagyadi safal to, jo saha atamgnan,

Temaj atamgnanni, prapti tana nidan.

This means- Non-attachment (renunciation) etc are fruitful only when accompanied by self-knowledge. (but) they could be used as tools to obtain the self-knowledge.

Souls' salvation is achieved through knowledge and appropriate action, one without the other is incomplete. In the absence of the knowledge of the self, they purify the mind and the intellect and eventually cause the knowledge of the self.

Then, the way to remove these defects or to keep them miles away from the spiritual pilgrim, the resort to the advice of an enlightened self-realised Guru is advised and advocated. All the authentic scriptures helpful to the pilgrim should be studied and followed under the guidance of such a Guru. Then only truth can be grasped and right experience of reality can be obtained. The importance and impelling need of a living enlightened Guru is repeatedly emphasised in order to keep clear of pride, conceit, and ignorance. Humility is declared as the root of right religion and therefore a disciple is advised to serve his master without any reservation. On the other hand one should not pose to be a Guru without developing proper

qualities himself. An unmerited Guru degenerates into a bad type of worldly person, and he leads his followers to deep darkness and bondage.

According to Shrimad, only a truly enlightened Guru deserves to be a spiritual guide. To follow others is a sheer waste of time.

Shrimad Rajchandra gives us a beautiful verse in No 38 saying that the true seeker is one who has attained the victory over his passions and has an earnest desire to seek salvation. He also has total non-attachment in worldly matters and his heart is full of compassion.. The original wordings are-

Kashayni upshantta, matra moksha abhilash;

Bhave khed pranidaya, tyan atmartha nivas.

Later on, the doubts of the aspirant regarding the six fundamental truths, are posed and considered and conclusively replied so as to dispel them for ever and to help the disciple to see the truth in its purity.

The original verse is –

Atma chhe te nitya chhe, chhe karta neekarma

Chhe bhokta vali moksha chhe, Moksha upay sudharma.

This can be broken down in the six statements

1. 1. *Atma chhe*
2. 2. *te nitya chhe,*
3. 3. *chhe karta neekarma*
4. 4. *Chhe bhokta*
5. 5. *(vali) moksha chhe,*
6. 6. *Moksha upay sudharma.*

In English these are

1. 1. 'Self exists.'
2. 2. 'This Self is permanent or eternal'
3. 3. 'Self is the author of its actions.'
4. 4. 'Self is the enjoyer, or sufferer of its actions or deeds.'
5. 5. "There is liberation".
6. 6. 'There is a method of obtaining liberation from bondage of Karma or actions.'

Father Francis X has translated this in the poetic verse as below-

"Soul there is"- "eternal it is"- "Soul its own acts does do":

And "tastes their fruits"- "Release there is". "Its means religion true"

Regarding the nature of the soul it is said that as it is quite different from the body, no bodily sense organ can perceive the soul. Philosophically

the soul and the body are two absolutely separate entities like the sword and its scabbard. The soul is neither a body nor the senses, nor breath. The soul is the source of organic unity of a living being. The soul is the all-knower, always the subject and co-ordinator of the information collected through the senses. The soul is conscious, knowing and blissful in nature. The conscious and the unconscious differ in kind and not in degree. Hence the unconscious cannot probe the conscious. But the conscious is a quite powerful light to understand the unconscious. Hence, the superiority of the conscious over the unconscious.

Such a soul eternally exists, it has no beginning and no end. The body which is composed, has an end but the unique soul is neither composed nor decomposed.

Though the soul and body are two different realities both are found to be co-operating in a living organism. One helps or hinders the other. All creation and dissolution can be understood by the conscious soul but the conscious soul can be known only by itself and by no other physical or visible means. Hence, the talk of the source and decay of the soul is unmeaning.

Shrimad confirms the belief in births and rebirths.

An unconscious body cannot act by itself. If an animal moves, it can only do so as directed by the conscious soul living in it. Hence, the soul is the author of all activities. It is not the nature of the soul always to act, though no activity can be without it, it can cease to act also. Metaphysically the soul has no reason to act and so it is unattached to the body, but in worldly practical life we see the soul propelling the living body to various activities to suit its motives formed by its association with and attachment to the body.

Further Shrimad has elaborated the Jain doctrine of Karma and its various categories, and has shown that no principle of God is needed to explain animal and human activities. Activities naturally bring the fruits enjoined with them and no divine force is needed for this arrangement.

He uses a fine logic to show that, as doing good or bad actions results in enjoying good or bad rewards, not doing them is the way to be free from their results.

The first path leads to bondage, the second to liberation. To say that only a conscious soul can initiate activity, does not mean that it must always act and as doing something brings some results, not doing it should bring the opposite results. If activity, good or bad, will lead on to bondage, keeping away from it should lead one to its opposite namely release. The great Tirthankaras have reached the state of non-attachment to all bodily forms, hence, they are eternally free. Release is the fruit of retirement from action. In the Siddha state, the Soul is absolutely separated from all Karmas and so this is the state of complete release. In this state the real nature of the soul is experienced for ever.

Shrimad says in verse No. 91-

Dehadi Samyogno, Aatyantik viyoga;

Siddha moksha shasvat pade, nija anant sukhbhoga

A final liberation and the ultimate bliss is only possible when there is a total and final separation of the body and the soul.(or happenings which are related to body)

The soul's long standing infatuation to bodily forms is removed by the enlightening knowledge and guidance of the right Guru just like dispelling a long standing enveloping darkness by a ray of light. By attachment, avarice and ignorance, the soul binds itself, removing them with the help of his Guru and the scriptures it obtains release. Wrong perception of truth is removed by right understanding of the scriptures under the guidance of an enlightened Guru.

The wrong habits of behaviour can be removed by a spirit of non-attachment to worldly activities. This is the correct remedy of the soul's ills. By anger one binds actions and by forgiveness he loosens the knots of actions and becomes free himself. Hence, forgiveness is declared by Shrimad Rajchandra as the gateway to liberation. Forgiveness destroys bondage to actions. Whoever, high or low, follows this path of liberation will certainly attain the goal. This path, in brief, consists in quelling down the excitements of anger, honour or pride, delusion and greed, in harbouring the desire form liberation and none else, in feeling uneasiness in worldly activities, in developing compassion towards all living beings and in feeling sympathy for all aspirants for liberation and in praying and working for their release. Whoever possess these qualities is on the correct path and he will certainly be liberated. By following this path one sharpens his spiritual insight, purifies his being, loosens his attachment with the body and burns his actions in the fire of his spiritual consciousness, gains power and light and in the end releases himself and becomes a guide to others for similar work. As this stage the released soul is neither acting nor it is bothered with the fruits of action. This is the essence of every good religion and this is the only accepted path to soul's liberation.

In the final fifteen verses, the whole subject is brought to its natural conclusion. It is shown that this work contains the fundamental of all six systems of Indian Philosophy too.

Verse Nos. 124 and 125 go like this-

Aho aho Shri sadguru, karuna-sindhu apar

Aa pamar par Prabhu karyo aho aho upakar

Shun Prabhucharan kane dharu, aatmathis sahu heen;

Teto Prabhue aapio, Vartun charanadhin.

O reverend Guru! You are the ocean of limitless compassion. You have obliged this ordinary mortal- ie me. (By showing the path). What shall I present at the feet of my Lord (what shall I give him). The biggest thing worth giving is my own soul but this has been given to me by you. (I can't give that back to you..) I pledge to surrender and follow your path.

Thus Atma Siddha is the quintessence of the truths of all scriptures.

In the end, in nine verses Shrimad has described the effect of this soul-saving knowledge on the disciple and the disciple pays his grateful homage to his Guru for his help and advice.

The last verse says-

*Deha chhata jeni dasha, varte dehateet
Te gyanina charanma, ho vandan aganit*

I repeatedly bow down at the lotus feet of that omniscient who has a body but who behaves like the one who is free from the bondage of his own body.

Shrimad's ascetic life style and strict code of conduct took its toll and he was in a poor health. He did not care at all for any material gain in his life and his weight had gone down to only 45 lbs. when he was 32-33 years old. He was in a perfect blissful state though and there was an aura of spirituality around him.

He died peacefully and in the state of samadhi at the very young age of 33 in AD1901. For his followers he is a Krupalu Deva (ever merciful god) and revered with utmost respect and devotion.

Ref:-

Shrimad Rajchandra, Two volumes
Atma-Siddhi-Shastra by Dhirajlal D mehta
Atma-Siddhi by J L Jaini
A Great Seer by Dr Saryu Mehta and Bhogilal Sheth
The Self Realization by Brahmachari Govardhandasji and D M patel
Philosophy and Spirituality of Shrimad Rajchandra by Dr U K Pungalia