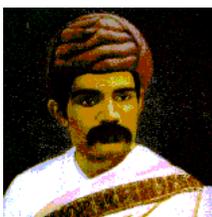


FEDERATION OF JAIN ASSOCIATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA [JAINA]

SHRI VIRCHAND RAGHAVJI GANDHI SCHOLARSHIP



V. R. GANDHI (1864-1901)



Live and Let Live
परस्पररोपग्रही जीवनाम्
JAINA Symbol

OBJECTIVES: JAINA had established this Scholarship in 1997 and started awarding these scholarships from 2001, being the 2600th birth anniversary year of Bhagwan Mahavir and incidentally the death centenary year of Shri V. R. Gandhi (VRG), in order to promote studies in Jainism, spread Bhagwan Mahavir's message of non-violence and universal love, a goal of VRG and more to honor VRG for his historical visit to the West to attend the first Parliament of World Religions at Chicago, U.S.A. in 1893. This scholarship is awarded to Sadhus, Sadhvis and students (Jains & non-Jains) for their advance, research studies in Jainism and VRG's unpublished literature at recognized Universities/Institutions. So far 52 scholarships have been awarded."

ACHIEVEMENTS: JAINA's VRG Committee is awarding scholarships for advance and research studies in Jainism since 2001 and had published VRG's Biography '*Jyotirdharni Jivan Gatha*' in Gujarati in the year 2001, in his death centenary year and 2600th birth year of Bhagvan Mahavir and later in 2003, the English version titled "*Glimpses of Jainism and Biography of Forgotten Hero Shri Virchand Raghavji Gandhi*". Since the inception of this scholarship, progress reports, names of scholarship recipients, names of the donors and other details are regularly published in JAINA's Quarterly Publication, Jain Digests.

These activities are done by the JAINA Committee consisting of Pravin C. Shah, Chair, ☎516-248-8265 Email pravincshah2k@yahoo.com; Chandrakant M. Shah, Co-Chair, 718-343-1603 Email shahchandra@hotmail.com; Prakash Mody, ☎46-491-5560 Email 4prakash@gmail.com; Dilip V. Shah, JAINA President, ☎215-868-0381 dilipvshah@gmail.com; Rita Sheth, JAINA Treasurer, ☎918-398-6024 Treasurers@gmail.com; Ashwin K. Shah, 718-343-3614; Gunvant Shah ☎732-246-4030; Pravin K. Shah ☎919-859-4944; Surendra C. Gandhi ☎718-897-6972; Vinay K. Vakani ☎201-967-9344. For liaison activities in India, there is the JAINA India Sub-Committee consisting of: Pravin H. Sanghavi ☎9324242324 Email: pksanghavi@yahoo.com; Dr. Bipin Doshi, ☎9821052413; Himatlal S. Gandhi ☎9323331493; Nilesh N. Dalal ☎022-25127673; 9324027673; Niranjan Shah ☎022-23685088. Pankaz Chandmal Hingarh ☎9820249041.

VISIT JAINA WEBSITE: www.jaina.org and click on VRG Committee OR www.jaina.org/vrgcommittee OR <http://virchandgandhi.blog.com> OR www.jaina.org/vrgcommittee/VRG_Committee.htm and refer different sections.

AN APPEAL FOR DONATIONS, SUGGESTIONS, & CONTACTS: We sincerely appreciate very much the support given by the community. We hope you will continue to donate for the good cause. Your valuable comments - suggestions are always welcome. For more information please visit websites mentioned or contact VRG Committee Members. We request Presidents and Directors of Jain Centers to print this appeal in their Newsletters and help us to raise greater awareness about VRG as well as in raising more funds. Looking to our progress and considering the projects undertaken, we are appealing for your generous donations. Please send your tax-deductible donations in U.S. Dollars payable to JAINA, indicating Scholarships, in the memo, with mention of your name, address, telephone number and email address along with your check and mail to the JAINA Treasurer, Rita Sheth, 5308 E. 80th Place, Tulsa, OK 74136, USA.

VRG MEMORIAL-CUM-MUSEUM: CONVERSION OF HIS BIRTH HOME INTO HIS MEMORIAL: The most important initiative is about bringing awareness of our glorious past heritage. North America's JAINA & India's WJC are working for raising funds for a permanent Memorial-cum-Museum by converting the ancestral home of Shri Virchand Raghavji Gandhi at Mahuva in Gujarat, India, into VRG's Memorial-cum-Museum for which architectural plans and drawings for strengthening the present house as also of providing suitable accommodation and facilities to the family of VRG, prepared by an architect from nearby city of Bhavnagar are ready but due to lack of donations-pledges, renovation is on hold. We are trying to help the surviving family members of VRG and rehabilitate them with suitable dignity. This memorial will house, in addition to VRG's all available historical materials - memorable plus Museum of Jainism, Auditorium, *Pathshala* (Religious School), Library and other related facilities. The present requirement for this project is estimated at US\$ 55,000 (Rs. 25,00,000) which includes cost of modernization and a reserve fund to be kept aside towards the regular maintenance and other expenses.

VRG COMMEMORATIVE STAMPS, VRG FAN CLUB AND FUTURE PLANS: Stamp is the best medium to perpetuate the memory of our national heroes. VRG being the great 'Indian Emissary to the West' deserves to be well recognized. It is heartening to know that the Dept. of Post, Government of India is scheduled to issue commemorative se-tenant stamps with First Day Cover, Brochure and Cancellation on September 6, 2009. These exclusive philatelic items will be released at a grand function with a special album in the presence of the elite dignitaries and national leaders at Mumbai, India. Special Souvenir and his biography will be released. For creating awareness, VRG FAN CLUB is being formed. Persons interested are requested to contact Pankaz C. Hingarh pajarotouch@yahoo.com. In future, we plan to make a documentary film on VRG's life and mission, arrange memorial lectures and essay competitions.

[June 10, 2009]

"VRG REMEMBERED" [BIOGRAPHY OF SHRI VIRCHAND RAGHAVJI GANDHI]

Early Life: Virchand Raghavji Gandhi was born on August 25 1864 at Mahuva, Gujarat and did schooling securing first place in matriculation examination from Bhavnagar, Gujarat. He was the first known Jain graduate, graduating from Bombay (Mumbai) University in 1884 at the age of 20. He was the first elected secretary of Jain Association of India at the age of 21. He was a polyglot who had mastered as many as 14 languages. He was first known Jain to be qualified as Barrister in London. VRG, a renowned Barrister-At-Law, a great exponent of Indian culture, a patriot, a humanitarian, a philosopher, a reformer and a Jain scholar made this possible and made us proud by revealing the true nature of religion, love, compassion, tolerance and *Ahimsa* (non-violence) at the Parliament attending as a Representative of Jain religion. Swami Vivekanand attended the same Parliament. He represented Jains at "Dharma Mahotsav" held at Ajmer, India in 1895 and was awarded gold medal.

VRG at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, in 1893: Late Shri Virchand Raghavji Gandhi was first known Jain ever to set his feet on United States of America soil to attend the Parliament. Acharya Vijayandsuri (Atmaramji) was invited to represent Jain religion. But principles-Code of Conduct do not permit Jain Monks to travel overseas, he recommended the bright young scholar Virchand Gandhi to be his emissary. VRG corrected the false, twisted and perverse impression of India, being the land of Maharajahs, tigers, cobras, magicians, heathens without any culture or civilization. He spoke as a non-sectarian Jain, but as an Indian first. He had studied Vedanta Philosophy, Buddhism, Christianity, Western philosophy which enabled him to talk on various subjects and present his views with confidence. He had clear vision, unbiased approach and clarity in his explanation. He defended Indian culture, Hindu religion under unjust criticism in the Parliament and elsewhere by elaborating its principles. He praised Mogul emperor Akbar for his being equal to all religions.

VRG and Swami Vivekanand: VRG and Swami Vivekanand both came to the West at the same time and with the same goal but Swami Vivekanand's work are well known. One of the U.S. Periodicals wrote while giving tribute to both of them when VRG and Swamiji died in 1901 and 1902 respectively, "The influence of Vivekanand's philosophy has been kept alive by his disciples by founding organization, like Ramakrishna Mission/Society whereas, it is a matter of great pity that no attempt has been made to keep his memory alive...". Swami Vivekanand wrote in 1894 while he was in U.S.A. ". This man defends his countrymen and religion. People of this country like him very much..."

One of the American newspapers wrote, "Of all Eastern scholars, it was this youth whose lectures on Jain faith and conduct was listened to with the greatest interest and attention. In Kasadova, he delivered a lecture on '*Some Mistakes Corrected*' on August 8, 1894, when the citizens awarded him a gold medal. The newspaper, 'Buffalo Courier', recorded the immense success of that lecture. During his journey, he also visited England, France and Germany and gave discourses there also. Herbert Warren, a religious enthusiast, abandoned non-vegetarianism and adopted the Jainism. He took notes from VRG's speeches and wrote a book on Jainism. V. Glasenapp, a well-known German scholar wrote his doctoral dissertation on the *Jaina Doctrine of Karma* and acknowledged VRG's lectures as the sole influence.

'Strangers In This Land' by E. Allen Richardson mentions about this Parliament and VRG's interview with New York Times then. At the Parliament where more than 3,000 delegates from all over the world belonging to many faiths attended, he impressed them by the sheer weight of his scholarship, with his six eloquent speeches and personality. At the Parliament, he played a pioneer role first time outside of India to make people aware that Jain religion is an ancient vibrant world religion. He was awarded silver medal at the Parliament. He propagated the relevance of Jain tenets and spread Bhagwan Mahavir's message of non-violence. He was 29 years old then. He delivered about 535 speeches on Jainism, other religions and socio- cultural lives in India which received wide publicity. Wherever he went, many literary and religious institutions, churches and societies not only accorded him warm welcome but also honored him. He was presented with medals and was requested to prolong his stay. People in Europe and U.S.A. liked him so much that they invited him twice thereafter, in 1897 and 1899. Every time when he returned from abroad, he was felicitated at a big welcome functions presided by dignitaries like Premchad Raychand and Chief Justice Mahadeo Govind Ranade in 1896 and 1899 respectively.

His Writings: VRG wrote many books and articles in Gujarati and English. He wrote three books on Philosophies: The Systems of Indian Philosophy, Religion and Philosophy of The Jains and The Yoga Philosophy. He wrote topics of cultural reforms like education for women and custom of repenting. VRG translated many publications, including *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ* in English from French in 1894 from an ancient manuscript found in Tibet. VRG's selected speeches titled "*Jainism in Western Garb as a solution to the Life's Great Problems*" and other compilations were published.

Relationship with Mark-Twain and Mahatma (M. K.) Gandhi: Modern research has revealed that Mark Twain, the father of American literature was so impressed by VRG and his Jain philosophy that his newspaper Buffalo Express had covered his immense success and on Mark Twain's visit to India. VRG displayed his hospitality and accompanied Mark to Jain temples. At several instances Mahatma Gandhi was misunderstood as V. R. Gandhi. VRG and Mahatma Gandhi were in intimate contacts for their experiments in diet. VRG used to give legal assistance to Gandhiji in preparing his legal briefs. In June 13, 1931 letter, Gandhiji clarified to Miss Emelia, Mac Bean of Chicago when she mistook him as VRG. (Refer <http://www.mkgandhi.org/letters/others/macbean.htm>). To commemorate the centenary of VRG's attendance at the 1893 Parliament at Chicago, local Jain Center has installed his statue at their temple in 1995. The Ohio Historical Society had given a big bronze plaque to Jain Center of Cincinnati-Dayton in 1994 marking 100 years of VRG's lecture in Cleveland on September 18, 1894 mentioning that VRG brought Jainism to Ohio State. Shri Chitrabhanuji during his monk-hood was pioneer to initiate the celebration of VRG's Birth Centenary on 25th August, 1964 in Fort, Mumbai where he and others addressed large gathering.

As a true humanitarian, he had sent Rs. 40,000 and shipload of grains from U.S.A. to India during worst famine of 1896-97. **As a true patriot,** he talked about economic and political freedom five decades before India became independent. He proclaimed at the Parliament that if India became independent, she would never invade any other country with violence. Today this statement appears as a prophecy that Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) proved in attaining India's freedom with peaceful means. **As a national figure,** he attended the Indian National Congress held in Pune as a representative of then undivided Bombay province Bombay in 1895 and International Conference of Commerce in London as an All-Asia sole delegate in 1899 where he advocated reforms of post-parcel system.

As a reformer, he established several institutions and societies in the West for promoting about Indian philosophy. He founded, (1) Gandhi Philosophical Society in Washington, (2) Society for the Education of Women in India (SEWI) in Chicago, (3) School of the Oriental Philosophy and (4) Jain Literature Society in London. Under the banner of SEWI, several Indian women came to U.S.A. for studies. During 1890s, women were not allowed to go abroad as well as the primitive practices of wailing and breast-beating repentance during mourning was prevalent that he reformed. Abolition of pole tax on Jain Pilgrimage: He got abolished the poll tax levied on Jain pilgrims at Shatrunjay and Palitana, risking his own life, being threatened by the Ruler of Palitana. **As a true follower of Mahavir Tirthankar's** principles of non-violence in 1891, he was responsible in winning the case known as "Piggery Case" in Calcutta High Court in closing down/removing slaughterhouse run by an Englishman at Sametshikhar, a holy place for Jains where 20 out of 24 Tirthankars had liberated their souls and attained Moksha/salvation. For that he stayed in Calcutta (now Kolkata) for six months and learnt Bengali language to prepare for a case which was lost in lower court but later won at the Privy Council.

An Early Demise: His lifetime ambition was to serve the country, mankind, Jain Community and spread Lord Mahavir's message of universal love and nonviolence across the world. He did not use his position for any personal monetary gains. He wanted to continue his activities for a long time and to accomplish much more but unfortunately he could not, as this brilliant and promising young man, full of hopes and aspirations died at the young age of 37 on August 7, 1901 within two months of his returning from third and last journey of the West, leaving unbridgeable void. The Jain community mourned his death and kept their business closed for five days. His short spanned life was full of great achievements. He sacrificed his brilliant legal career and died for the cause of Jainism and service to humanity/mankind.

His name will continue to be remembered forever as a great champion of Indian cultural heritage and Jainism.