

Pandit Parshu Ram Nagar

A multi-dimensional personality

Dr SP Shrivatsa

As my memory goes back to early fifties, it was during August, 1953, when I met Pandit Parshu Ram Ji Nagar, popularly known as Hakim Paras Ram for the first time. He had interviewed me informally and briefly and, appointed me as a teacher in Sanatan Dharam Kanya Pathshala, Julakka Mohalla, Jammu. He was then the President of the Managing Committee of that educational institution. After my appointment when I put up my problem of accommodation before him, he provided me a room, free of charge, in the newly built Gandhi Bhawan, Jammu (a magnificent and historical building) which was constructed under his supervision.

A tall man as he was, with a smiling face and sweet tongue he could impress even his foes, at the first meeting. I was really amazed to know from my colleagues in S D Sabha Kanya Pathshala and Gandhi Bhawan, that he was also associated with so many other social, cultural, religious and political organizations where he was holding commanding positions. Thus it is obvious that he was one of the great and well-known personalities of Jammu and Kashmir during early fifties.

He was born in a Nagar Brahman (a community of Gujrati Brahmana) family at village Rae Koota, Tehsil Hiranagar on 19th August, 1892. His ancestors had migrated from Visnagar and Yadnagar (Gujrat) three hundred years ago. His father, Pandit Jagat Ram Dave was

an Ayurvedic physician, who in addition to his Ayurvedic Chikitsa used to perform Karam Kanda also in the houses of staunch followers of Sanatan Dharam. It is not out of place to point out here that the title of Raizada stood conferred on Nagars of Rae Koota by the rulers for their knowledge of Ayurveda and curing of dreaded and incurably chronic diseases.

When the newly born child Parshu Ram was only of 40 days, he was adopted by one issueless lady, namely Shrimati Chandan Devi Nagar, philanthropist and staunch Sanatanist lady (widow of late Pandit Kanshi Ram Nagar). She was known for her austere living and social services. She had constructed Sarais, temples and performed so many Yajanas.

Thus, it was but natural that Pt. Parshu Ram must have imbibed the spirit of social service. After having passed his matriculation with distinction, he was sent to Lahore (now in Pakistan), for higher studies in Ayurveda and Sanskrit, where he was admitted in DAV College, a prestigious institute of Ayurvedic studies during those days. After four years of hard work and regular study in the institute, he was awarded the degree of "Kavi Raj" (A degree in Ayurveda). During his stay in Lahore, he also obtained distinction in Sanskrit studies and thus got a commendable command over the Sanskrit language.

After his arrival at Jammu, he started his own clinic at Jain bazaar and within a short period, he gained popularity as a specialist in kidney and gout trouble. He discovered a medicine namely "Arogya Sudha" which showed tremendous effect on kidney trouble that brought name and fame for him. Acutally, he had inherited so many formulas from his ancestors, who were known for being experts and specialists in the Ayurvedic field to cure serious ailments.

When Rao Raja Hukma Singh started his manufacturing unit for the preparation of Ayurvedic medicines in Jammu, Pandit Nagar was appointed as incharge of that unit. He was also entrusted with the task of looking after free dispensaries started by Seth Vinayak Misra of Calcutta in Vinayat Misra Dharamshala at Gummat Bazar, Jammu.

Because of his keen interest and love for Sanskrit and Hindu Dharam Shastras and scriptures, he was once requested to teach Sanskrit in Ragunath Sanskrit Maha Vidyalaya, Raghunath Mandir, Jammu, by Dharamarth Trust. He worked there as Vice Principal and later on as principal and taught Sanskrit to students.

At the same time, he continued his practice as Ayurvedic physician. Due to his efficacious diagnosis and sympathetic treatment of the patients, he became well known *vaid* not only in J&K state but in other parts of the country also. It is said that some Indians living abroad and some foreigners also used to come to his clinic for treatment and used to place orders for his patent medicines. To cope with the growing rush of the patients, he started a new clinic at Mohalla Julaka Jammu. He was elected as President of Jammu Prantiya Ayurvedic Sabha, a number of times. He was appointed as first Chairman of the board of Ayurvedic and Unani System of Medicines in J&K State by the Government headed by Bakshi Gulam Mohammad in 1961 (the then Prime Minister of J&K state) and held this position till his death in April 1969. He was also a member of the Advisory Committee for Ayurvedic College, Jammu. He was also appointed as member of the Board of Central Council of Indian Medicines by Government of India.

As a philanthropist and a man of versatile genius, Pandit Nagar attained popularity in many other fields also. He was fond of music, drama and several other cultural

and social activities. People used to sit together to hear his melodious Bhajans and other classical songs. According to Veteran Journalist, Om Saraf Pandit, Nagar's tongue itself was so sweet that people used to enjoy conversation with him. It was he who initiated the process to establish Shri Sanatan Dharam Natak Samaj in Dewan Mandir Jammu. He also established a Ram-Lala hall at his native village Koota. It was he who initiated theatre movement in Jammu which gained momentum within a short period. He himself used to take active part in Ram Leela, Krishan Leela and other dramas being staged in Dewan mandir and on other stages in Jammu. Many a time he had acted the role of Lord Rama, Lord Parsu Ram, Raja Janak, Lord Krishna, Abhimanu etc.

Influenced by his theatrical art, the world famous singer, late K L Sehgal and the film star and comedian, Om Parkash Badkhi (both Jammuites) became his disciples and accepted him as their Guru. They started their carrier under his able guidance Dev Kumar, actor had also good intimacy and friendship with him. The famous dramatist and film star, Balraj Sahni also was one of his admirers who would write to him of and on for taking his advice regarding theatrical art, dramaturgy and film affairs.

When Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah took over the administration of the state in 1947. Pandit Parshu Ram Nagar was entrusted with the work of Refugee problems. He took keen interest and tremendous pains to look after the problems of thousands of refugees coming from Pak-occupied territory and also from West Punjab. Pandit Nagar accomplished this challenging task very creditably in his capacity of Honorary Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioner. This tiresome assignment was really a test of Pandit Nagar's ability, which prompted Sheikh Abdullah to invite him to join the active politics and

appointed him as Jammu District President of the National Conference and after a brief span of time, he was made Provincial President of the said party. But after some time, he developed some differences with Shaikh Abdullah and resigned from the post. He formed a new political party with social and secular policies namely Jammu and Kashmir People's Party. A grand conference of this party was convened in Jammu in which national leaders like Madhu Limay, Dr Ram Manohar Lohia and George Fernandes participated.

Bakshi Gulam Mohammad invited him to take over the complete charge of construction work of proposed Gandhi Bhawan, just outside the premises for the present New Secretariat. He not only supervised the construction work but also raised funds for the same. The inaugural ceremony of Gandhi Bhawan was performed by Dr. Rajinder Prasad, the first President of India. As Pt Nagar was an art lover, he requested Bakshi Gulam Mohammad to open Dogra Art Gallery in Gandhi Bhawan which was acceded to by the latter.

Dr Karan Singh, the then Sader-i-Reyasat had also commended Pandit Nagar's services for the construction of Gandhi Bhawan and when a proposal for the construction of a War Memorial at Satwari came up, Dr. Karan Singh himself requested Pandit Nagar to be in charge of the same. Again, he not only supervised the construction, but also collected funds for its constructions. With the result, a beautiful building of war memorial was built there through his painstaking efforts.

Pandit Nagar was the first Jammuite to initiate the idea of construction of a memorial in the memory of Maharaja Gulab Singh. He took keen interest in it and formed "Maharaja Gulab Singh Shatabdi Committee" of which he was the convenor. Later on, he was appointed its President by the members of the committee. Five/six

birth anniversaries of Maharaja Gulab Singh were celebrated under his presidency. It was mainly because of his personal interests that Ghulam Bhawan was constructed, in memory of Maharaja Gulab Singh. After the completion of Bhawan, Maharaja Gulab Singh Memorial Trust was formed of which Dr Karan Singh became trustee.

Pt Nagar was also elected as president of Jammu Prantiya Brahman Sabha and Brahman Mukhya Mandal. He was also appointed as member of General Council and Executive Council of the Academy of Art, Culture and Languages during Kh. Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq's regime.

Apart from the above mentioned services rendered by Pandit Nagar, he had also played a dynamic and crucial role in connection with construction of Geet Bhawan, Snatam Dharam Kanya Vidyala at Mohalla Jullaka for which he also donated his own land, Goushala at Amphalla. In addition to the above, he was also associated with a number of other organizations mentioned below:

1. Gandhi Sewa Sadan, Gandhi Smarak, Nidhi Shri Ram Krishan Ashram, local Auditorium advisory committee of All India Radio Jammu Station, Bharat Sewak Samaj, Indian Red Cross Society, Chamber of Commerce, Govt Arts and Crafts, Exhibition Committee and National Defence Committee, etc.
2. As a Kath Vachak and a Pandit

He used to recite Katha of Rama Charita Manas Shrimat Bhagwat Gita etc in Gandhi Bhawan, Geet Bhawan, Brahman Sabha, Krishan Dwara etc. where prominent personalities of Jammu including Dr. Karan

Singh used to come and listen to the sermons and religious recitations. He donated all the offerings of the Katha for the construction of Geet Bhawan Gowshala and Krishan Dware etc.

3. As a writer and a scholar

(a) His contribution to Dogri language and literature

He translated Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta in Dogri and published a book with Sanskrit Shlokas, with version in Dogri Poetry and Nagri and Persian Scripts. The price of the book was fixed by the author as a promise to read at least one Shloka every day. This work was highly appreciated by prominent personalities like Dr. Sidheshwar Verma, Dr. Karan Singh, Prof. Gauri Shanker Ram Nath Shastri and many others.

He also gave valuable suggestions and proposals for the development and popularizing Dogri language and literature to the Cultural Academy, Dogri Sanstha and other such institutions.

Similarly he composed a song (Taranas) in Dogri, which was also applauded by the public at large and the scholars.

He also published a 'Sanskirtan Manjari' Book with Bhajanas and mythological tales in Sanskrit and Hindi.

A book on Ayurveda was also published by him.

He was very fond of flowers, plants and herbs. All around his bungalow at Talab Tillo, he had developed a beautiful herbal garden where he also planted 'Illachi', Pista and other medicinal plants.

This great personality left this mortal world on 22nd April, 1969. People from all walks of life including Dr. Karan Singh attended his funeral.

(The author is a writer based at Jammu.)