



SHRI DHARMIKLAL CHUNILAL PANDYA



Shri Dharmiklal Chunilal Pandya is widely recognised as the foremost master of Gujarat's ancient Maanbhatt "Maan Aakhyan" tradition, a distinctive oral storytelling art rooted in medieval Aakhyan literature. Characterised by rhythmic narration of epics with classical music, poetic expression, and the unique use of the *Maan* (a copper vessel played with ringed fingers), this tradition has served for centuries as a medium for conveying the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Bhagwat* and Puranic narratives, along with moral and cultural values.

2. Born on 11th August 1932 in Vadodara, Shri Pandya inherited this art from his father, Chunilal Pandya, and began performing in the early 1950s. For more than seven decades, he has devoted himself to reviving and sustaining this endangered tradition at a time when it was nearing extinction. Through extensive performances across Gujarat and India, including at prestigious venues such as Rashtrapati Bhavan, and through long-form Aakhyan series, he brought this heritage to diverse audiences.

3. Shri Pandya has also represented the Maanbhatt tradition internationally through cultural tours and spiritual discourses in the United Kingdom, Zimbabwe, Zambia, the United States, Canada, Nepal and Thailand, thereby introducing global audiences and the Indian diaspora to this rare art form. His extensive recordings with All India Radio and Doordarshan include complete renditions of the *Harivansh Puran (From Uttar Mahabharat)*, *Shiv Mahapuraan*, and all forty Aakhyans of the medieval Gujarati poet Premanand. In recent years, curated digital outreach by his family has further expanded the tradition's reach.

4. In addition to preserving classical repertoire, Shri Pandya has composed new Aakhyans on contemporary social themes such as water conservation and environmental awareness. He institutionalised training through the Shree Maan Aakhyankala Shikshan Kendra, mentoring students, including his sons Pradyumn and Mayank Pandya who still carryout performances of this art thus ensuring generational continuity.

5. Shri Pandya's contributions have been recognised with numerous honours and awards. He is the recipient of the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1983) and is the only Maanbhatt artist to hold this distinction. His other honours include the Kirtan Kesari Award and Maankala Kaushal Certificate from Jagadguru Shankaracharyaji (1980); the Gaurav Puraskar and multiple appreciation awards from the Gujarat State Sangeet Natak Akademi (1980s); recognition by the Vadodara Municipal Corporation (1984); awards from the Swaminarayan Vichar Trust, Amruta Institute (Mumbai), Gujarat Lokkala Kendra, and the Pandit Omkarnath Thakur Award (Government of Gujarat, 1994-95); International honours from the Gujarati Literary Academy (USA, 1996) and Sanyas Sewashram (Kathmandu, 2008); and later recognitions and felicitations from Sanskar Bharti (Vadodara, 2009), Triveni Institute (2012), 8th Delhi International Arts Festival - Sangeet Natak Akademi (Delhi, 2014), 19th Bharat Rang Mahotsav - National School of Drama (Delhi, 2017) the Gujarat State Government (2017), and Shadj'a Kala Kendra Trust (Bengaluru, 2017).