

Sri Chandra Maharaj – Polestar of the Udasins

One evening, a few years ago, during a weekend visit to Akhanda Mahapeeth Ashram, Sree Sree Maa remarked to me, “Let us go to meet my Udasi Gopal.” Sree Sree Maa’s ‘Udasi Gopal’ was our beloved centurion sadhu, Sri Gobindadas Udasi Baba. It was my first visit to his Manoharpukur Ashram. With great enthusiasm Sri Udasi Baba showed us around the ashram premises established by his Guru, Sri Purnananda Maharaj, a mahatma known for his great penance and spiritual prowess. He first showed us his Guru’s Samadhi and then took us to the temple of Sri Chandra Maharaj, whom they regard as the fountain-head saint of their Udasi sect, much like Sri Sri Shyamacharan Lahiri Mahashay is respected in the Kriya Yoga lineage. It was the first time I heard of Sri Chandra Maharaj also known as Chandradas Baba. “Sri Chand Baba is the son of Guru Nanak. I will tell you more about him when we get back”, remarked Sree Sree Maa. I was beguiled. I had not heard about such an illustrious son of Guru Nanak. While on our way back, I checked out on the Internet using my mobile phone and realized it was my ignorance. Sri Chandra Maharaj is revered as a great saint who demonstrated miraculous spiritual powers since childhood and lived for around 346 years, devoting his entire life for the upliftment of people. We returned to our Ashram and I waited patiently till Sree Sree Maa refreshed herself. After dinner we sat around her and she began to tell us about this great master.

“It was more than a decade and a half ago. Gwalior Baba was staying in our Akhanda Mahapeeth Ashram during that time. One evening he showed me a very old picture of a saint that he had torn off from

the pages of a book half a century ago. By then the picture had faded considerably and this valuable item was close to disintegrating. Gwalior Baba had requested several good artists to restore the picture or develop a replica based on this, but none could satisfy him. So he asked me if I could arrange to get it done by a known artist of high calibre. I received the picture from him and took a close look. Below it was inscribed ‘Jagadguru Srichandraji Maharaj’. I gazed at the portrait of this divine looking saint as Gwalior Baba narrated the story of Sri Chandraji’s life. My heart melted with reverence when I heard that he was the son of Guru Nanak-dev. I then requested permission from Gwalior Baba to allow me to try and revive the worn off image. He consented.

It was late evening. I took the fragile piece of paper to my room and immediately embarked upon recreating the image of the saint. The outline had become blurred and the task at hand looked quite daunting. With a fervent prayer of ‘Jay Sri Sri Babaji Maharaj’ on my lips I took out my black pen and began drawing. Immediately a dazzling dot of light began moving along with the nib of the pen. I was not surprised, rather delighted, at seeing the power of the Guru Maharajas taking up the work through me, something which often happened when I was writing under their guidance. I felt blessed and my being went into a breathless state. The pen was working so lightly on the paper that the nib was just rolling over without putting any pressure on the almost ‘broken into pieces’ paper of the portrait. Slowly I observed the picture becoming alive. After two hours of work I took the final version to Gwalior Baba. He was extremely delighted and asked Prakash (now

Swami Sanvedananda) to develop a photo out of it and make several copies. I told Baba that since this work was accomplished through the grace of the Guru Maharajas, the immortal soul of Sri Chandra Baba would probably also be pleased and give darshan. While I made this impromptu statement out of my faith and reverence, little did I realize that it would materialize into reality within twenty-four hours.

The next day in the afternoon when I went to serve lunch to Gwalior Baba he said, 'Mayi, last night I was blessed with a divine dream. I saw myself in the Kumbha Mela of Prayag. There under a large banyan tree I

saw an illuminated saint holding satsang, surrounded by several people. He was fair-complexioned with golden hair with his golden matted braids descending to his shoulders. I went and offered my pranams to him and he blessed me with a gracious smile. I felt someone from the



side telling me that this saint is Sri Chandra Maharaj, a living embodiment of Maharshi Markandeya.' Saying this Gwalior Baba became silent and began to take his food. A flutter of bliss ran through my being. Sage Markandeya is the renowned author of the revered Markandeya Purana. His fame encompasses the three worlds.

I then gathered more information about this great soul. On the calling of Guru Nanak, this avatar-like mahatma took birth as his son to demonstrate the unique combination of yoga and tyaga epitomizing the unattached renunciate – the Udasin. The word 'Udasin' derives from urdham (higher) + asinam (seated) or one who remains in an

uplifted state. Such a soul-being is always aware of his union with the supreme soul, thereby always living in truth consciousness. It is said that when Sri Chandracharya was born, his body was covered with holy ash. He was extremely fair and had on one ear a dazzling gold earring, symbolizing advaitic (non-dual) realization. Everyone felt that Lord Shiva himself had manifested." Saying this Sree Sree Maa completed – her tone filled with revered admiration. We spent some time in meditative silence.

I made a quick survey on the life of Sri Chandra Maharaj. He was born on 1494 in Talwandi village of Punjab. Examining his horoscope, scholars prophesized that he would show light to millions of people and through his gentle nature would sooth their lives ravaged by worldly struggles. He received his first initiation from his father, Guru Nanak when he was a little boy. From childhood

he remained detached and would often escape to the jungles for meditation in solitude. To keep him in society, he was attached to a tutor and sent off to the home of his tutor-Guru. Very soon he mastered all the available knowledge and with the permission of his teacher went to Kashmir for higher studies. Here, from great scholar saints of Kashmir he acquired higher forms of knowledge and was soon a realized person. During this period, he met with the renowned yogi, Sri Avinashi Maharaj and took sannyas diksha from him and was admitted to the Udasi path. Thereafter, on instruction of his Guru, Sri Chandra Maharaj

travelled all over the country to enlighten people.

He spread the message of eternal truth in his own inimitable manner, epitomizing the ideals of a tyagi-yogi who not only attained self-realization for himself but also devoted his whole life to remove the sufferings of the common people. On occasions he displayed his apparently unlimited yogic powers - travelling across the skies or re-flowering the dead. Once when emperor Jahangir tried to force him to come to his court in Lahore and sent elephants for the purpose, Sri Chandra Maharaj remarked to the king's men, "Tell your emperor that, far from taking me captive, his elephants do not have the power to lift even my rug." Later Jahangir himself came to seek his blessings. Living for almost three centuries and a half, Sri Chandra Maharaj blessed many eminent people of all sides including Emperor Humayun and Maharana Pratap. Several generations of the Sikh Gurus sought his blessings and guidance. His teachings were simple yet deep. Realization of eternal truth and living in it was its core. Simple living and constantly clinging to the supreme was the message he gave to the Udasins. Much of his teachings is codified in the short thirty-six Matras, which today forms the core principles of the Udasi sect. I did some

quick research and summarized the important aspects in the following attempted verse, my own version of The Song (Gita) of the Udasin:

Usadin Gita

(From Teachings of Sri Chandra Maharaj)

Using gyan¹-cotton, cloth you shall make –
Thread spun by vairagya-santokh-vivek²,
With needle of surat³, through Sadguru's
grace –
The cover of immortality, stitch in place;

With qualities of virtue, patch this drape –
In death-defying dress, from bondage
escape,
Wear a jacket of atma-gyan⁴, topi of
kshema⁵ –
Langoti of sheel⁶ and girdle of samyama⁷;

Put on a cloak of truth, tie a seli of nirvan⁸ –
In a desire-free jholi, keep your batua of
dhyan⁹,
Let unattachedness be your morchad,
nirbhay the thread¹⁰ –
Modesty the earring, Hari-bhakti¹¹ your
asan-bed;

Let pleasure-pain burn away, earned seeds
of deed –

¹gyan = knowledge

²vairagya = renunciation, santokh / santosh = happiness , vivek = discerning conscience

³surat = meditation on the inner light

⁴atma-gyan = Self-knowledge

⁵topi = cap, kshema = forgiveness and tolerance

⁶langoti = loin cloth, sheel = virtue

⁷samyama = spiritual discipline

⁸seli = thread around neck, nirvan = liberation from cycle of birth and death

⁹Jholi = sling bag, batua = purse, dhyan = meditation

¹⁰morchad = peacock feather put on head like Krishna did, nirbhay = fearlessness

¹¹Hari-bhakti = devotion to God

In this sacred dhuni¹², sacrifice all desire-
greed,
Sayyam¹³ as the begging bowl, sura¹⁴feet of
the Lord –
In the pyala¹⁴ of pure mind, drink amrit-
naam¹⁵ of God;

The vital breath moves along, in ida-
pingala –
Through purak-rechak open, doors to
sushumna¹⁶,
Calm the house of the mind, through dhyān
nirantar¹⁷ –
Through samadhi get enlightened, enter
brahm-ghar¹⁸;

Steady mind is riddhi¹⁹, immortality the
staff –
Patience the axe, penance the sword-stuff,
Use Nirgun-gyan²⁰ as shield, Guru-
shabd²¹ as bow –
Make Intellect your kavach²², preet²³ your
arrow;

Only Avinashi Guru knows, secrets of
brahm-vidya²⁴ –

With Guru's grace-guidance, sadhak
becomes siddha²⁵,
Such a devotee breaks through, the fortress
of maya²⁶ –
Returning to the eternal abode, attaining
true kaya²⁷.

Sree Sree Maa remarked, “The Lord takes avatar in many forms to manifest truth and bring succour to the suffering millions. Among them Sri Chandra Maharaj was a Shiva-avatar – an embodiment of perfected realization and renunciation. Later, in more recent times, this great spark of light came again in the form of Swami Pranavananda the founder of Bharat Sevashram Sangha, reinforcing the Gita's famous enunciation of ‘Yada Yada hi Dharmasya ... Sambhavami Yuge Yuge.’ Our Sri Sri Baba was a great admirer of Swami Pranavananda, a towering personality whose life of penance, realization, renunciation and service remains a source of inspiration to all seekers.”

Yet another connection with the life-continuum of a spiritual giant was established.

**-Sri Partha Pratim Chakrabarti,
Her Blessed Child**

¹²dhuni = sacred fire of an ascetic

¹³sayyam = patience

¹⁴pyala = saucer / plate

¹⁵amrit = nectar, naam = name

¹⁶Ida-pingala-shushumna = astral nerves, purak-rechak = steps in pranayama

¹⁷dhyān-nirantar = steadfast meditation

¹⁸brahm-ghar = home/realm of brahman

¹⁹riddhi = prosperity/ wealth

²⁰nirgun-gyan = knowledge of attribute-free infinite

²¹Guru-shabd = words of the Guru

²²kavach = talisman

²³preet = affection / friendship / love

²⁴brahm-vidya = spiritual science

²⁵sadhak = spiritual aspirant or seeker, siddha = adept / one who has attained enlightenment

²⁶maya = illusion

²⁷kaya = body / embodiment