

Glimpse of the life of a young and energetic Jain saint
Dr. Sri Padamchandraji Maharaj Saheb
(A powerful orator, annotator, preacher and inspirer of Jain values)

Dr. Padamchandraji Maharaj Saheb is a rare combination of childlike innocence, youthful zeal and profound in-depth knowledge of an experienced sage. His pursuit of knowledge, austere ascetic practices, teaching skills, leadership qualities go to making a dynamic young Jain saint. He undoubtedly inspires people from all walks of life and of all age groups.

This young and dynamic personality was born on 27th July, 1964 in the famous sun-city Jodhpur in Rajasthan. *He was named Gautam but his people fondly called him Raju.* His family members were religious and traditional and used to regularly visit Jain *Sadhus* and *Sadhvis*. On one such occasion he went with his mother to his native village named Harsolav to have the *darshan* of Mahasati Saubhagya Kanwarji Maharaj Saheb. She happened to see the child's feet which he had playfully spread it across and she observed a '*Padma-Rekha*' in his feet and called him Padmachandra and from then on he was called by the name Padamchandra. His father was Sri Mishrimalji Kankaria, a businessman running the seventy year old reputed firm 'Fakirchand Naharmal Jain' in Mandor Mandi, Jodhpur. His father was a highly religious person right from his childhood and loved to serve the *Sadhus*, *Sadhvis* and the *Sâdharmik* brothers and sisters. His mother is Mohinidevi (Mohankanwar) and she too is a highly religious lady very famous for her rigorous occasional penances like *Masakshamana*, *Atthai*, etc. She has observed nearly 40 *Atthais* (eight-day long fasting) and even today she aspires to observe an *Atthai* every year. Dr. Padamchandraji Maharaj Saheb in his '*Sansarik Paksha*' has five brothers and they all are well settled and devoted to the Jain faith.

Born with a silver spoon, he had his primary and secondary education in Jodhpur. In 1984 he graduated with a B.Com degree, in 1986 he did his post-graduation in Philosophy and in 1987 he registered for his Ph.D in the Rajasthan University and in 1988 after much hard work he submitted his doctoral thesis titled '*Bharatiya Darshano mein Anekant Darshan – Ek Vishleshan*' (A study of Anekanta in Indian Philosophy).

In spite of the highest degree and the best education he could not imbibe much on the religious front like his parents did. He felt a void in his life and wanted to master the art of right living and put his education to some practical use. He contacted the like-minded youth of his city and took up many social service projects, there by enhancing his leadership qualities and acquiring unprecedented confidence and fame.

His spiritual journey began in 1983 from the spiritual and religious camp conducted by *Jaygachain Mahâmandir*, Jodhpur under the guidance of the legendary *Âchâryas* of *Jaygachha* of the calibre of late Sri Jeetmalji Maharaj Saheb, Lalchandraji Maharaj Saheb and the present *Âchârya* Sri Shubhchandraji Maharaj Saheb and the present *Upâdhyaya* Sri Parshvachandraji Maharaj Saheb. The spiritual and religious camp ushered a new life in the young and dynamic youth Padamchandra so much so that it rocked the religious, cultural and academic scenario of the sun city for a decade.

From 1983 to 1988 he initiated a cultural and religious revolution in the Jain society of Jodhpur city. He inspired the youth to channelize their energy in the right direction in a constructive way. He inspired them to take up socio-religio-cultural activities for the betterment of the society. He began the *Pathashala* (Sunday schools) in Shrutacharya Chauth Bhavan, Mahila Bagh, Jodhpur. It was conducted and managed so well that it grew in strength day after day. Seeing its popularity and success, Padamchandra was inspired by the members of the society to start such religious schools in Asop, Nagaur, Raipur, Sojat and many other places. He established contacts with the members of the respective regions and administered proper functioning of the *Pathashalas*.

Besides the above he established the Jay Jain Gym (*vyâyâmsâhala*), Jay Jain library, Jay Jeet Tailoring Institute and Jay Jain Mahaveer Coaching Centre and personally monitored their administration and function. On Mahaveer Jayanti and other Jain festivals and religious events, he took the initiative and led the religious processions and events from the front. Most of the times, the models he made for the above processions got the first prize.

In 1984 he worked tirelessly to prepare the first ever Jain calendar in the world and publish it. The calendar and its contents on the back page were of so much value that within two years it became a priceless possession of scores of households throughout the country. Today it is published as 'Padmodaya Jain Calendar' and nearly one lakh copies of it are printed and distributed every year. This speaks volumes about the exemplary talent, far-sightedness and industrious nature of Sri Padamchandra. He was also a member of the 'Joints International Group' of Jodhpur and he actively participated and conducted various camps under its auspices and contributed to the reputation of the group by taking part in many other programs and events. He ran an institute by name 'Kankaria Type Writing Centre'. Even in the business field his polite behaviours, able leadership and hardwork paid rich dividends and it progressed manifold.

What led to the *Vairagya* of this young and dynamic youth? What inspired him to renounce the world? Buddha saw a diseased man, an old man and a dead man only once and he was inspired to search the truth, but we mortals see everyday but never reflect on the facts of life and continue to exist instead of living a meaningful life. Very rarely we come across people who are truly awakened and live a meaningful life and inspire others to do the same. I am reminded of an incident of his childhood which Dr. Sri Padamchandrajji Maharaj Saheb himself narrated during his *Chaturmas* discourses in the year 2002 at 'Jay Parisar', Veperiy, Chennai. He said that when he was a small boy of eight-nine years of age, his mother once observed eleven-day fasting and was eagerly waiting for some renunciates to come to her place for *Gochari*, so that she could offer food to them and then break her eleven-day penance. His father sent him to the Jain prayer and community hall of Simhapol to get the pious ascetics. He reached there and requested them to come and he saw to it that they came with him to his house as desired by his mother. The monks collected the alms offered by the devoted family and left for the community hall. However the saints forgot one *Pâtrâ* (wooden bowl) in the house. After the departure of the monks Sri Mishrimalji saw the bowl and told Padamchandra to go and inform the saints about their missing bowl. When the ascetics came to collect the *pâtrâ*, his father pointed out sarcastically to the ascetics and said that if they

forgot their *pâtrâs* at the place of the householders like this, what would they go and show to the *Gurudev*! To this the ascetic replied that they were never careless and said that this incident indicated a future happening. They said that somebody in that house was destined to hold the *pâtrâs* in future, i.e., someone was bound to renounce the world in the near future. There were mixed reactions from the family members. The father laughed away the matter but his mother said that only the fortunate can take the *pâtrâ* and lead an austere life for the welfare of all. The young boy Padamchandra listened to all the reactions and became thoughtful. He told to himself that he desired to take the *Pâtrâs*, i.e., he wanted to renounce the world and that the humble ascetic was not wrong!

He whispered the same to one of the family members and the latter replied that to become a *Sâdhu*, one has to study the voluminous religious and philosophical texts, master languages like Sanskrit, Prakrit and become well-versed in different branches of learning. The latter advised the child to first enhance his knowledge and then talk of becoming a renunciate. The child heard carefully and at the tender age of 8-9 years became determined to pursue the religious and philosophical studies seriously. Thus the seed of renunciation (*vairâgya*) was sown in the mind of child Padamchandra. It began to grow slowly and steadily but he never had the courage to express it until his graduation. He tried but courage failed him. He was very apprehensive about the whole idea and kept it buried, but watered it by becoming proficient in learning and mastering the sacred scriptures. His multifarious activities from 1983 to 1988 are indicative of the above fact. From then on he tried to express his desire of renunciation but all his near and dear ones discouraged him in all possible ways. Padamchandra realized that due to delusion (*Moha*) and attachment it was indeed difficult for his own people to understand and respect his noble feelings. The wise say that so is the case of all ignorant and deluded souls.

At the time in 1986 Âchârya Sri Jeetmalji Maharaj Saheb and other seven *sadhus* camped in *Shrutâchârya* Chowth Bhavan, Mahila Bagh, Jodhpur for the *Châturmas*. During the *Châturmas* Sri Nutanmuniji Maharaj Saheb expired at a very young age and after some days Âchârya Sri Jeetmalji Maharaj Saheb too left for the heavenly abode. These two incidents reinforced the decision to renounce the world in Padamchandra and he was fully determined to tread on the holy path of the Jinas and become a self-conqueror like them and get rid of the miseries of birth and death. Pujya Sri Lalchandrajji Maharaj Saheb was conferred the title of the tenth *Pattadhar* of *Jaygacch* by the four-fold congregation. During his only *Châturmas* pontiff in 1987 at Pipad, Rajasthan, which is just 55-60 kms from Jodhpur, Padamchandrajji Kankaria used to visit the pious saints once in three days or a week, listen to their discourses and nurture his idea of renunciation. At the same time he attended to the family business with a detached spirit and as mentioned earlier he actively took part in all kinds of religious-cultural and social activities and inspired others to take life seriously and contribute their share for the welfare of the society and nation at large.

After the *Châturmas* wherever Âchârya Sri Lalchandrajji Maharaj Saheb went Padamchandra travelled there to Khangtâ, Âsop, Pali and other places and served him with devotion. Finally when they reached Jodhpur he visited them regularly and served the then Âchârya Sri Lalchandrajji, Âchârya Sri Shubchandrajji, the present Acharya Sri Parshvachandrajji, Upadhyay Gunvantchandrajji and others. Then came the Akshya Tiritiya

celebration in Bhagat Ki Kothi in which Padamchandra took active part and after the celebrations His Holiness Âchârya SriLalchandraji MaharajSaheb asked him as to why did he delay in embracing the holy order of complete renunciation! To this he replied to *Gurudev* that he did not wish to delay any longer and was determined to executehis earnest desire. He heard the *Mangalik* and returned home.

As soon as he reached home he got the news that *Gurudev* had become serious and had taken the vow of *Sallekhana-Santhârâ* and after Padamchandra and thousands of others reached there they saw the *Gurudev* in *Samâdhi* after which within two hours he breathed his last. The mortal body was taken to MahilaBagh from Bhagat ki Kothi and it was sunset by then. Padamchandra and many others remained there throughout the night. Everybody felt lost due to the sudden demise of *Gurudev* but Padamchandra felt the most miserable for he remained deprived of being ordained by *Gurudev* and also he could not fulfill the last wish of *Gurudev*. He could not sleep through the night and remained disturbed.

The next day the last rites were performed by the members of the Jain community. The mortal remains of *Gurudev* were burning and at the same time the heart of Padamchandra was also burning with repesitation. Padamchandra was now fully determined to seek the permission of his family members for renunciation in spite of their resistance. One fine day when the discourse of Âchârya Sri Shubhchandraji Maharaj Saheb and present Acharya Sri Parshvachandraji Maharaj Saheb, was in progress in MahilâBagh, Jodhpur, Padamchandraji stood up and boldly announced the day of his initiation as 25th June, 1988 and requested the pious saints to initiate him on that day. He added that his parents were not giving him the permission and so he sought the permission of the *Shree Sangh*. The very same day he resolved to observe complete fast of three days (*Chauvihar Tela*) and informed everybody that if he did not get the permission for initiation he intends to continue his fasting.

Finally the Kankaria family had to give in and on 25th June, 1988, he was initiated by the great Âchârya His Holiness Sri Shubhchandraji Maharaj Saheb and Upâdhyaya Sri Parshvachandraji Maharaj Saheb in the presence of other *Sâdhus* and nearly ten thousand people in Sardar Higher Secondary Vidhyalaya, Jodhpur. He was ordained as the disciple of late Âchârya Sri Lalchandraji Maharaj Saheb.

The very same day after his initiation he made an excellent and impressive speech on the principles of Jaina philosophy and its relevance in modern times and all the people present there realized the potential of this energetic saint and were convinced that the *Jaygacch* has got a very talented young saint who would carry on the mission of *Jaygacch* to promote the Jain values and principles of Lord Mahavira and the late Sri Jaymalji Maharaj Saheb. From that day began the sanyami journey of Padamchandraji Maharaj Saheb and he has successfully completed more than two decades of observance of non-violence, self-restraint and multifarious austerities. He has been tiring day and night to work for the welfare of one and all and travels by foot across the length and breadth of India to promote the great Jain values of Lord Mahavira and the tradition of *Jaygacch* initiated by the late Âchârya Sri Jaymalji Maharaj Saheb.

In 1996, he meditated for fifteen days observing the *Âyambil Tapasin* the cave of Achalgadh in the famous hill station of Mt. Abu in Rajasthan and did the *Sâdhanâ* of 'Anuppeha-Dhyân' in accordance with the sacred *Agamic* tradition. His devotees observed a sea change in the personality of Muni Padamchandraji. This *Sâdhanâ* and *Âradhanâ* i.e., his spiritual accomplishment and devotion enabled him to manifest some divine powers and the same is reflected in his life and works. Today his powerful and thought provoking discourses draw people from all walks of life. During his 1996 *Châturmas* in Jodhpur he gave excellent and out of the world discourses on the *Badi Sadhu Vandana* composed by Pujya Sri Jaymalji Maharaj Saheb and the same have been compiled and edited by Shri Pukhraj Mohanath and published initially by Jaymal Jain Memorial Trust, Chennai and then by Sri Jaymal Jain Parshva Padmodaya Foundation, Chennai. The five volume series of discourses were so well received by the ardent ascetic and lay followers of Jainism across India that within a span of eight years three Hindi editions have been published.

His discourses on the compositions of Jaymalji Maharaj Saheb like *Shalya Chattisi*, *Dharma Mahimâ*, *Chausath Sati Vandana* given in Raichur, Chennai and Bangalore respectively have gone a long way to inspire the common man to pursue a spiritual and noble life.

One should see to believe the young ascetic preach so impressively and profoundly amidst thousands of people at such a young age. His discourses are spiritual in essence, revolutionary in inspiring the masses, practical to the core and pleasing to the ears. They kindle the light of knowledge, the spirit of renunciation and the beauty of the pure soul all in one go. His discourses have brought to light the hidden pearls of Jain wisdom spread in the vast *Agamic* literature and commentary literature. They kindle the hearts of people of all age groups and hence his discourses have been widely acclaimed by members of different Jain sects as well as non-Jains. He simplifies the profound teachings and presents it in a very impressive way, thus making an impact on all concerned.

Another attraction is the *Anuppeha Dhyân Sâdhana* taught in the annual All India Spiritual and Religious Camps in different cities and also at the camps conducted for children, youth and adults during the *Châturmas*. Previously around 200 candidates used to participate in the annual religious camps but over the years nearly 2000 candidates started participating in the annual All India Socio-Cultural-Religious-Spiritual Camps.

Inspired by the magnetic and thought-provoking discourses of Muni Shri Padamchandraji in South India alone within a short span of nearly three years, fifteen thousand to twenty thousand lay householders have taken to the partial vows of a householder (*Shravaka Vratas*) and nearly two hundred couples have taken the vow of celibacy. Following the Anuppeha Dhyân technique thousands of people have benefited and got relief from stress in the fast-paced life of today. Such is the inspiration and influence of the young and dynamic Dr. Padamchandraji Maharaj Saheb who is blessed and ably guided by his *Gurudev* and devotedly assisted by his group of ascetics and scores of lay devotees.