

PANCHASAKHA

CHAITANYA'S PANCHASAKHA

In the holy land of Kalinga (Odisha) many saints, mystics, and devotional souls have taken birth, from time to time, and have fortified the culture and the spiritualism. Among the various great souls, the most prominent (in the domain of the known History) are the **Panchasakha** (Five friends) who have deeply influenced both the Oriya Spiritualism and the Literature. These five friends lived between 1450 to 1550 AD and enriched the spiritualism in a way that normal man can also understand and benefit out of that. These great souls are: **Achyutânanda Das, Ananta Das, Jasovanta Das, Jagannâtha Das** and **Balarâma Das**. They are popularly known as Panchasakha (Five friends).

Pancha means five and Sakha means friends -The great spiritual leader and Naamayogi Avataar **Chaitanya Mahaprabhu** has referred to these five of his disciples as Panchasakha and stated that the Panchasakha are like his Pancha Atma, i.e., five souls (Atma-Tattva) and are in no way lesser than some of the Avatars of Vishnu. Shri Chaitanya was the first to establish the Bhaba-Mishrita Naama Marga (the path of chanting the holy name with proper feeling and faith); before him this method was not so popular or well-known even if the path is partly described in the ancient Vedas. He first introduced this method for all the simple-minded people and made many realize that God-realization can also be achieved by simpler method of pure devotion without undergoing difficult method of austerities. It is he who first disclosed the importance of the Hare Krsna Maha Mantra.

The Panchasakha converted ancient Hindu texts into prose (of simple language) easily understood by the people of Udra Desha (Odisha). Shri Achyutananda Das was the most prolific writer of the Panchasakhas and has written numerous books (called as Pothi's), believed not in one life but in many successive lives. He is known as the Mahapurusha, which means - *a great man*. Mahapurusha Achyutânanda was a shunya sadhak and had acquired immense knowledge about almost every aspect, i.e. spiritualism, Ayurveda (Indian healing medical science that uses only natural resources and herbs), various other sciences, and social regulations.

There is an interesting belief about the origin of Panchasakhâ which relates them to the Mahabhârat era (*Dwapara-Yuga*), and is also stated in Shunya Samhitâ written by Mahapurusha Achyutânanda. Here, Mahapurusha describes, Panchasakhâ literally means "five mates or friends". Towards the end of Mahabhârat era when Lord Krsna was leaving the mortal body, Nilakantheswara Mahadeva (another name of Lord Shiva, residing in Puri, with a blue-coloured neck caused by intake of poison to save the world) appeared and had a conversation with Lord Krsna. He revealed that the Lord's companions Dâmâ, Sudâmâ, Srivatsa, Subala, and Subâhu would reincarnate in the Kali-Yuga and will be known as Ananta, Acyutânanda, Jagannâtha, Balarâma, and Yasovanta, respectively. Thus, the believers of the Panchasakhâ consider that these five saints were the most intimate friends of Lord Krsna in Dwapara-Yuga, who came again in Kali-Yuga to serve Him. They are also instrumental to perform the crucial and much-awaited Yuga-Karma of destroying the sinners and saving the saints, according to the Sanatana-Hindu beliefs.

To describe briefly the individual ways and specialities of the Panchasakha, it is told that :

Agamyā bhāba jānee Yasovanta
 Gāra katā Yantra jānee Ananta
 Āgata Nāgata Achyuta bhane
 Balarāma Dāsa tatwa bakhāne
 Bhaktira bhāba jāne Jagannātha
 Panchasakha e mora pancha mahanta.

[in Odia]

Yasovanta knows the things beyond the reach
 Yantras using lines and figures are known to Ananta
 Achyuta speaks the past, present, and future
 Balarāma Dasa is fluent in tatwa (ultimate gist of anything)
 Ultimate feelings of devotion are known to Jagannātha
 These five friends are my five mahantas.

[English Version]

The birth/origin of the Achyutānanda is described as:

!! Shunyarū khasilāa Pavane misilāa, anaakare helāa thulā !!
 !! Thulā bhangigale athule misiba, rahijiba anaahata !!

“Mahapurusha Achyutānanda”, is belived to have been born with special mercy or divine intervention from “ॐ” which is symbolic for Lord Jagannāth Himself (“*Vibhuti Yoga, Shrimad Bhagavat Geeta*”). Hence the name of Mahapurusha is Achyuta (“A + chyuta”: A= Shri Visnu; Chyuta = created from). Occasionally, “Mahapurusha Achyutānanda” is also referred to as “Achyuti”, which literally means “who has no fall (“chyuti nahin jāhāra” in Oriya language)”. Sri Achyuta Das was born to Dinabandhu Khuntia and Padma Devi in a village called Tilakona in Odisha in about 1510 AD on a “Magha Sukla Ekadasi” (a specific time described in Oriya calendar). His parents were childless for a long time and were praying to Lord Jagannāth for a child. One night his father had a vision that Garuda (the bird of Vishnu, an Eagle) gave him a child. Next morning he rushed to the temple and prayed at the “Garuda Khamba” (a pillar in front of the Jagannāth temple) thanking the Lord for his mercy. At this point there are two different beliefs: some are of the opinion that he (Dinabandhu Khuntia) found a newborn divine child there and he is Achyuta. Some others believe that, soon after this incident (vision), Padma Devi was booned with a divine child.

Mahapurusha Achyutānanda had established various spiritual energetic centres called ‘Gādis distributed throughout east India (former states known as Anga, Banga, Kalinga, Magadha) and some in Nepal. These ‘Gādis were host to most of the spiritual actions, discourses, penance, and provided various services to the seekers. Examples are, Nema, Kakatpur, Garoi, Jobra Ghāt (a river bank in Cuttack) etc. During this brilliant era of Panchasakhā, another seer His Holiness Arakshita Das (the presiding seer of Olasuni near Paradeep) who was not among the Panchasakha but was a revered saint, once found a divine child and handed over the newborn child to Mahapurusha Achyutananda. This child was known as Ram Das who is the disciple of Mahapurusha Achyutananda, Panchasakha, and Arakshita Das together. The Pancha Sakha were called as Pancha Guru (five Gurus) and together with Shri Arakshita Das they were known as Sada-Goswami (six Lords). Shriguru Arakshita Das, a great Shunya Sadhak, is the patron saint and seer in the Olasuni hills.

Olasuni hill is located near the border of Cuttack and Jajpur district, adjacent to the Daitari- Paradeep Express Highway near the Ratnagiri and Laitgiri hills. The Gobari river also flows nearby. Olasuni hill was the place of Sadhana where Shri Arakshita Das performed austerities in a cave (Olasuni Gumpha)

before attaining salvation. The annual nine day Gumph festival of Olasuni is very famous. There is also the temple of Goddess Olasuni, near the tomb of Saint Arakshita Das. Baba Buddhanath Das sings in a song that Goddess Olasuni is the mother of Shri Arakshita Das, one of the greatest ShunyaVaadi Sadhakas. He is extremely merciful and accepts every offer, irrespective of any other factor, when they are offered with feelings.

Subsequently the Pancha Sakha and Arakshita Das, in Samaadhi, could know that in the 13th birth (also the last birth) of this child (Ram Das), all their souls (Atma-Tattva) will remain in Ram Das and he will perform Yuga Karma on behalf of his Gurus during the transition from Kaliyuga to Satyayuga. The devotees and followers believe that His holiness Baba Shri Buddhanâth Das is the last incarnation of Yogi Ram Das and is enlightened by the conscious of his six Gurus.

SATYABADI PANCHASAKHA

A band of selfless youngmen namely Pandit Gopabandhu Das, Acharya Harihar Das, Pandit Nilakantha Das, Krupasindhu Mishra and Godavarish Mishra who distinguished themselves in later life as scholars and national leaders are popularly known as Satyabadi's Panchasakha. The Panchasakha or five comrades contributed their best for the cause of national aspirations. They were equally dedicated to the blend of educational as well as political uplift of Odisha.
