

# **Acharya Kundakund**

## **From A Cow Herder to the Greatest Acharya**

- **Dr. Jayanti Lal Jain**

### **The Cow Herder**

Long ago, there lived a cow herder who used to take the cows of his master to the jungle for grazing. One day, he was surprised to see some barefooted well-to-do people in the jungle. He followed them and found that they all had come to have *darshan* of a Jain Muni (Monk). At the request of those people, the Monk started to deliver his discourse. The herder tried hard to understand the theme of the discourse. The essence of the talk was simple -- All creatures are alike and divine by nature; anyone can become God if knows one's own self (soul).

The herder thought again and again till evening. "I am a poor boy. Is it possible that I am God? All others are calling me fool, but this saint has called me God". In the evening, he started returning to his village. On the way, it started rained and he was completely soaked. He did not eat his dinner and thought about the Monk's discourse over and over again. When the boy did not get up in the morning, his mother woke him up and observed that he had fever. The mother called the doctor and with the help of medicines, he became alright after two weeks.

As soon as the boy recovered, he went to the jungle and found that the jungle was burnt. He was worried about the cows and started searching all around. He saw that a tree was not burnt. A natural question arose in his mind. "Who set the jungle on fire and who saved this tree?" Then he recollected the Monk's discourse, "changes take place of their own in this world, nobody is controller and all are independent". When he went near to the tree he saw a hollow opening and there was a leaf in it. Something was written on it but he could not read as he was an illiterate. He remembered from the discourse that the soul is immortal and fire cannot burn it. He decided to give that leaf to the Monk and started searching for him. He requested the Monk to accept the leaf and oblige. The Monk blessed the boy and said that he had done two great things for the world. First, the leaf could have been lost or destroyed but by saving that, he had preserved a *shastra* (holy book). Secondly, he had handed over to a deserving person and thus propagated preaching's of the *Arihant*.

That incident changed the life of the cow herder and he became more kind to the cows. One day, he saw a cow in trouble while crossing the river. He ran to save the cow but stumbled against a projection. He had sever injury and realized that death is certain. He resorted to *Samadhi maran* (meditation and fast unto death) and died remembering the preaching of the Monk about the divine nature of all creatures and how one can become God. However, they have no control over external events like death.

### **Padmaprabh**

After his death, the herder was born as a son in a rich family in Kaund Kundpur, a town in South India. His father's name was Gunakirti and mother's Shantaladevi. He was named as Padmaprabh. As he grew, he was displaying extraordinary characteristics. When crying, the child would become quiet if the mother sang a bhajan lullaby - "He is pure (shudda), enlightened (buddha), without attachments (vitaragi) etc". Padma used to have short sleep cycles. One day at the age of two, the mother was worried and called the doctor. The doctor advised that the child is perfectly healthy and the short sleep was due to his sharp mind and great receptive power. When Padma was four years old, his mother started imparting education. One day the child told that he would not get education from the mother as she was not teaching new things. Then the mother decided to learn when the child slept and taught him during the day. Further, the parents decided to have a learned teacher for Padma.

Once, two great Acharyas Anantakirti and Jinachandra were seen in the jungle near the city. Padma also went to have *darshan* of them. In the jungle, the saints were meditating and delivered their sermon at the conclusion of their meditation. Padma was very much impressed by the preaching. Acharya Jinachandra praised his sublime thoughts during his discussions with Padma. When Padma was about to enter his 11<sup>th</sup> year, the family organized grand birth day celebrations for three days including many religious activities, many people were invited. However, the boy became very serious in his pursuit of the path to moksha and expressed to his parents the desire to give up family life and become a monk. His mother wanted him to be the Mayor of the town and was not happy with his decision. Padma's determination was firm and the mother could not stop him. The mother did not want to become an obstacle in the noble path of salvation for her son and ultimately yielded and allowed him to become an ascetic.

## **Kundakund**

At the age of 11 years, Padma renounced the family life and became a Jain muni and was then addressed as Padmanandi. His penance impressed all and his fame spread all around. He became known as Kundakund because of his birth place being Kaund Kundpur. Interesting to note here is that though the names changed from Padma to Kunda, both words have the same meaning – lotus flower. It was said that he was like “kundan” which means very fine and pure gold. Indeed, he was a purified and glittering Soul. Kundakund was declared as Acharya by the Sangh at the age of 44. King Shivaskandha of Pallava dynasty, a King of Kerala region was so impressed that he renounced royal life and became a member of his Sangh. Many others followed the King. Penance made Kundakund's body very strong and other ascetics in the group realized that he was able to walk even without touching the surface of the earth.

One day, Archarya Kundakund had a keen desire to know some subtle facts about scriptures. Only Thirthankar Simandhar of Mahavideh region could tell that. It is a place in the middle part of the Universe where Thirthankars are always there. Strangely enough, Thirthankar Simandhar although millions of miles away, blessed, and said “May the dharma prosper”. The Chakravarty King of Mahavideh who was present there wondered what it meant. The King realized that it was a blessing for Acharya Kundakund. Two heavenly beings present there heard this and wanted to have glimpse of such a great saint. On arrival on earth to Ponnur Malai in Tamilnadu (125 kms away from Chennai) where Acharya was having penance for four months of rainy season, the two gave their introduction and requested him to accompany to Mahavideh. Kundakund Acharya accompanied them and had *darshan* of Thirthankar Dev and also of *Samosharan*, a gathering of noble souls of the Universe. The King and others there had a gigantic body of more than 2000 feet, while he was only about 6 feet. The King lifted the Acharya on a palm of his hand with joy. Acharya looked like a piece of cardamom in a hand and hence called as Elaacharya. He stayed there for 8 days and gained subtle knowledge of pure soul and the path to moksha. While returning, on the way, his peacock pichhika fell down and he used for a short time, pichhika of Griddha, a vulture, and he was named as Griddhapichha Acharya. Thousands of people had gathered to witness a rare event of return of Acharya from the flying visit. As it was not known when he would return, many disciples (monks and others) had fast for eight days since no one wanted to miss that great scene of Acharya's return from the other world. His body was glittering like gold when he returned. The word “Ponnur Malai” means golden hill. There was resounding voice everywhere in and around this hill as follows:

Mangalam Bhagwan Viro, Mangalam Gautamo Ganee  
Mangalam Kundakundaryo, Jain Dharmostu Mangalam

On return to Ponnur Malai, he composed several scriptures and laid a very strong foundation for Jain literature as taught by the Thirthankara. He was acclaimed by the people then as “kalikal sarvajna”- the omniscient of the present era and was awarded the third place after

Bhagwan Mahavir and Gautam Ganadhar. He attained Samadhi at the age of 96 at Kundradri in Karnataka.

### Historical Importance and Works

Jainism is not founded by anyone at any time in history. It predates known history. It is revealed by Thirthankaras/ Arihants from time to time and communicated to generations and generations by Acharyas, saints and other scholars. The present available Jain literature stems from Bhagwan Mahavir and his disciple Gautam Ganadhar. Kundakund Acharya remains most prominent one after them. After about 600 years of Lord Mahavir's nirvana, it was Acharya Kundakund who re-established his teachings with its pristine grandeur, depth and spirit and is being continuously revered by all seekers of truth since last 2000 years. Even inscriptions on all the idols in *digamber* tradition bear his name.

“Had Shri Padmanandinath (Shri Kundakund Acharya) not enlightened with the divine knowledge gained from the present Thirthankar Shri Simandhar Swamy of Videhkshehra, how could the monks know the true path”

- Devsen Acharya, Darshansar

“He was the most accomplished monk among accomplished monks and the latter hovered around, hummed and took shelter like bees under lotus (Kund).

He was the pure soul who consecrated the teachings of Thirthankaras in this Bharat Kshetra. Who will not have reverence for such a great personality on the earth?”

- An Inscription on Chandragiri Mountain, Gommetshwara, Karnataka

The scriptures composed by him are treated as authentic as preachings of Ganadhar. His five major works, Samayasar, Pravachansar, Panchastikay, Niyamasar and Ashtapahud are known as best ever written. These unravel the mystery of the Universe and almost guarantee realization of pure soul and moksha to anyone who delves into them. His other works include Parikarm, Moolachar, Rayanasar, Dasabhakti, Barasanuvekkha, and Kural, although there are controversies about the authors of some of these works. He has written 84 Pahud scriptures but many of these have been lost. He spent prolonged periods of time writing scriptures due to which his neck posture got slightly affected. As a result, many of his followers fondly addressed him as Vakragriva. The major five works of Kundakund are incomparable whatsoever anywhere in terms of its coverage, subject matter, depth and subtleness. A brief introduction about these is given below;

- **Panchastikay** deals with five substances viz. soul, atom, dharma (motion), adharma (medium of rest) and space. “Asti” implies existence and “kay” means the space occupied by the substance. Time - the sixth substance occupies only one space unit while the other five substances occupy more than one unit of space. This book deals with internal structure, nature and basic properties of substances in the Universe. This promotes understanding of existence of our soul in the Universe vis-à-vis other substance.
- **Pravachanasar** refers to the essence (sar) of the teachings (pravachan) of the omniscient Arihants. The eternal principle of right conduct of Jain philosophy based on right faith and right knowledge. Right conduct is undoubtedly the Dharma which stands for equanimity and equanimity knows no attachments or sorrow and is caused by realization of soul.
- **Niyamasar** describes about the rule that guarantees moksha. The book deals with cause and effect relation in the self which leads to right faith, right knowledge and right conduct. It contains a detailed discussion on eternal and continuous “bhav” known as “paramparinamika”. Other than this bhav, no other bhavas are conducive to the path of

moksha. It is a unique book that lays down the inexorable rule or law for achievement of moksha.

- **Ashtapahud** is a collection of eight chapters. The eight chapters are darshan, sutra, charitra, bodh, bhaav, moksha, linga and sheel. Acharya has clarified many misgivings that arose due to lack of proper understanding of jaina principles, which were misleading the public, scholars and even saints. The purpose was to give a new life to eternal values of knowledge, religious practices, code of conduct etc based on true interpretation of the same.
- **Samayasar** is recognised as the “God in words” (shabdabrahma). The word “samay” has many meanings. Here it refers to the self. In essence, it is a rare and untold story of real self which has never been experienced by all of us. The stories of passions, sensuous pleasures and bondage have been known and experienced by all. It reveals secrets of almost all concepts of Jain philosophy in terms of nature of pure soul. Those who do not study this book miss the greatest and infinite treasure of Jain philosophy. In Samayasar, Acharya is at his best, his philosophy acumen at best and Jain Philosophy is in its most brilliant form, illuminating and fascinating the reader and left with indelible impression.

This story highlights how an ordinary person like the cow herder became a great Acharya. His sincere desire to (a) learn from the saint and (b) preserve the leaf ultimately led him in his future birth to (i) an opportunity to learn from the Thirthankar and (ii) preserving the preachings of Arihant by composing several scriptures. It is often said that there can never be a Muni (Monk) like him, neither such a Muni had been born in the past nor would be born in future in this present fifth era. The teachings of Lord Mahavir will last until the end of the fifth era, i.e. 21000 years after Mahavir’s nirvana. Acharya Kundakund will be remembered at least for another 18500 years along with Mahavir Bhagwan for the true path shown by him. Even if his teachings are inscribed on plates made of gold and letters made of diamonds, the value of his teachings can never be assessed.

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Teachings are end less, time at our disposal is short;  
Our wisdom is misdirected, hence learn only that leads to  
End of births and deaths.

Acharya Kundakund, Ashtapahud

**About Dr. Jayanti Lal Jain:** Dr. Jain currently serves as Director, Center of Philosophical Sciences, Mangalayatan University at Aligarh, India. He is a very learned Jain scholar giving daily Pravachans, covering multiple aspects of Jain studies, delivering key note speeches for many Jain programs or special auspicious events for the last 25 years. Dr. Jain holds Ph. D in Economics from Oklahoma State University, USA and Ph. D in Jainology from University of Madras, Chennai. He was Professor Emeritus at Department of Jainology, University of Madras. He worked at Indian Bank, Chennai as Chief Economic Advisor/ General Manager. Dr Jain has published many articles on Jain Philosophy and on Economics, Banking and Finance. His books on 'Pure Soul and its Infinite Treasure', 'Acharya Kundakund and Jain Philosophy' have been published by University of Madras. He has delivered many special lectures in India and abroad and has considerable teaching experience.