

Udasis and Sikh Gurus

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'Abstract'

Baba Shri Chand, son of Guru Nanak Dev, founded a new *gaddi*, opposite of the preaching of his father. This could never be considered a part of the Sikh religion. Notwithstanding the ideological differences, the relations between him and other Sikh gurus remain cordial. During the *Khalsai* struggle *Udasi* saints looked after the gurudwaras. At this time and in the time to come *Udasi* saints preached about Sikh religion in accordance with Shri Guru Granth Sahib. Not only they preached but they also began many works in the spirit of social welfare. Almost all the *Udasi* saints respects and obey the principles and rules as are described in the sacred book. Shri Chand lived up to the age of 139 years in which he saw the life span of as many as seven Sikh gurus. His relations with them were based on mutual respect and understanding. Even though we do not accept *Udasi* cult as a part of Sikh religion, still we have to agree on the point that *Udasis* never abused Sikh religion, neither did they go against it.

The people and land of Punjab State has been an important symbol, both in spiritual and moral aspects, for its ancient civilisation and tradition. The land of Punjab has been the land of the sages from the time immemorial. As in Punjab, the seeds for India's civilisation were sown by the sages and afterwards by the Sikh Gurus. The fertility of the land and happiness played an important role for the development and growth of every religion. The people of Punjab adopted Hinduism in the Vedic age. It is important to mention here that the civilisation of the Sindhu valley before the Aryans has given them a very simple and appropriate religious life. This and Vedic religion both had a deep impact on the religious life of the people. Preaching about Buddhism and Jainism began somewhere in the 6th Century. This marked the development and growth of these religions on a wider scale. In the medieval era (East Medieval and North Medieval eras) meaning the *Saltant* era and *Mughal* era marked the growth of Islam. This land gained importance to itself with the birth of Guru Nanak Dev in 1469 AD. He chose Bhai *Lehna* as his predecessor before the former's demise. This started a tradition and string of Sikh Gurus which ended with the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. The tenth Guru elected Guru Granth Sahib to be the next Sikh Guru, and that not only increased the importance of Sikh religion but also provided it a unique and never diminishing shape. Almost everyone knows that after Guru Gobind

Singh, Banda Bahadur provided a new direction to the Sikh religion and the Sikh society. On the other hand, during this time *Mahants* were growing their *deras* rapidly without any interference from any side. A try to understand the *Udasi* cult alongside the *Udasi* saints' contribution in preaching about the Sikh religion would definitely provide us with a clear understanding about the relations of Baba Shri Chand with Sikh gurus. It is wise to write in here about that.

A cursory glance at the Sikh history is enough to make it evident that the Sikh religion is a flowing river of sacrifices. In the world history of religions, there is a scant possibility of example where sacred souls gave away their lives to save the religion. However, some sacrificed their bodies, some sacrificed themselves in service of Sikh religion and others spent their whole lives preaching about the religion. Notwithstanding the contribution, historians did not give places to many great people. Baba Shri Chand, the elder son of Shri Guru Nanak Dev, is one of them. Struggle and even war for the attainment of the throne has been a regular occurrence in the history of mankind. Possession of power and struggle for throne was the main cause for Mahabharata. History of every community is full of domestic wars. However, the behaviour of Sikh community with Baba Shri Chand and his cult can never be justified. If a *Mahant* committed a blunder and a bloody event happened afterwards, still whole of the people belonging to that society cannot be deemed guilty for that. Late Giani Sant Singh Maskin in his book *Kaht Darshan* writes that instead of applying medicine on the wounded arm we have sawed it.

There is no doubt that *Uadsi* cult is a new cult. From the beginning of time until Baba Shri Chand, many sages and kings were the followers of this cult. He initiated an intact and principled nursery, and he planted four plants in the different directions of India. This resulted in the development and growth of this cult and at present in this country and abroad have almost 3500 *gaddis* to which approximately 50,000 *sadhus* and *Mahants* are related and it is hard to tell the numbers of the followers. These saints are of both kinds married and celibate. Guru Nanak Dev, founder of Sikh religion, raised voice against the superstitions, false rituals and hypocrisy, prevalent at his time. Baba Shri Chand, born in the home of Baba Nanak, carried forward his father's work in his own way. Both, the father and the son travelled the world, had an understanding that until the people would stop believing in these superstitions and hypocrisies of the religions, and until their souls would remain dead, they will not stand against the cruelties meted out on them. Although, both of them had some ideological differences, their aim was same. They both aimed at taking people out of the superstition and hypocriticality rampant at their times. The total time span from the birth of Guru Nanak in 1469 and the demise of Guru Gobind Singh in 1708 is 239 years. Baba Shri Chand was born in 1494 AD and he remained on this earth for some 149 years. During his lifetime, seven Gurus sat on the *gurugaddi*. The seventh Guru

Shri Har Rai Ji succeeded Guru Hargobind Ji after his demise in 1638. Baba Shri Chand died some five years after this event in 1643.

Sikh historians do not mention the meetings of Guru Angad Dev Ji and Guru Har Rai after their reception of the *gurugaddi*. These two gurus have ever met him is a debateable fact, even though Guru Har Rai was the son of his first follower Baba Gurditta. Other four gurus respected him for being Guru Nanak's son. The Gurus would often visit *Barath Sahib* to meet him and he, too, would visit them. Historians (Gandha Singh, Hari Ram Gupta, J.S. Grewal, S.S. Bal, Harbans Singh) bear witnesses to this in their writings.

The account of the relations between Guru Sahibs and Baba Shri Chand is necessary as to know the cause which shaped the earlier and later form of *Udasi* cult towards the Sikh religion.

Baba Shri Chand acquired the ideas of *simran*, *samadhi* and *bhakti* from his father. Guru Nanak's spiritual life influenced and shaped the childhood of Baba Shri Chand. He had all the characteristics of his father. As is the Punjabi Idiom, "*Pyo Pr Puttar, Nasal pr Ghoda, Bahuta Nhi Te Thoda Thoda.*" According to the Neurological science, son acquires almost all the aspects of the personality of his father. He learnt everything from the revolutionary works and ideology of welfare. None of them had any armed bodyguards, or an army. They never were afraid of anything, never hesitated. Thus, all this Baba Shri Chand learned from his house, especially from his father. The garden planted in our house would naturally fragrance our house.

Langar, which he initiated with a small amount of 20 rupees, is still going on in many *Udasi* deras and Gurudwaras even after almost 550 years. Due to this, the relations between Sikh society and *Udasi* society are becoming strong.

When the life and principles of Baba Shri Chand are analyzed closely, it proves that Baba Shri Chand tried hard to materialise the preaching of his father and lived a life of an ascetic in hard discipline to help the needy and the poor. The aim of Baba Shri Chand's life was welfare of the others. He was not like any ordinary saint focused only at his personal liberation. He never liked this idea, instead he, like his father, thought the social welfare to be his duty. You were certain of the fact that to live life after leaving all the worldly duties is not right. He through his spiritual meditation attained some miraculous powers. He used them mostly to cure the patient or the disease ridden persons. He would always preach and encourage the masses to live a simple and ascetic life. Guru Nanak Dev roamed around the world for the betterment of the people.

Some scholars, even today, debate about the idea that Baba Shri Chand did not adopted all the ideals of his father, whole-heartedly. However, there is no doubt that he respected his father. If this be not so, he

would never have write himself to be “*Nanakpoota*” in his work seminal work *Matra Bani*. ‘*Aarta Nanak Patshah Da*’ this entire work worships Guru Nanak Dev. He had many similarities with Guru Nanak Dev. Baba Shri Chand is blameless here as well. Guru Nanak Dev would choose Bhai Lehna his successor was certain from their first conversation, where Guru Nanak says, “You are Lehna (a play on the word *lena* meaning to take it), and I am here to give.” Then to go on debating about and doubting on the ability of Baba Shri Chand does not make any sense. If we look at it from another perspective, Guru Nanak Dev’s ideology as can be derived from his works supports the fact that the only a married person would have been his predecessor and he knew the decision of Baba Shri Chand to remain celibate all his life. Guru Nanak also advocated and preferred the idea to serve others over personal deeds. His *Banni* bears witness too it, “*Vich Duniya Sev Kamaiye Tan Dargah Vasan Jayiye.*” Thus, the father and the son shared a cordial relation.

When Guru Nanak Dev chose Guru Angad Dev as his successor, he revolted by applying ash on his body and on his hairs. This marked the beginning of *Udasi* cult.

The relations between Guru Amardas and Baba Shri Chand were very cordial. Guru Amardas Ji was the most elderly of all the Sikh gurus. He lived up to the age of 95 and for twenty-one and half years, he was the Sikh guru. He was born in 1479 AD and went to the heavenly adobe in 1574 AD. He lived in his residential village *Baskre*, before the attainment of *gurugaddi*. He would go to Haridwar barefooted every year before the attainment of *gurugaddi*. There is a Gurudwara, in his memory, at Kankhal. He was 15 years elder to Baba Shri Chand. Guru Amardas, after attaining the *gurugaddi*, visited Dera Baba Nanak and then went to Barath Sahib to meet Baba Shri Chand, as he was there. There is a grand Gurudwara built in his memory and it also has an idol of Baba Shri Chand. The meeting of these two great souls was very polite, cordial and affectionate. After formally asking about each other’s help, they shifted their conversation to Divine love. At that time Bhai Jetha, who later became the fourth Sikh guru with the name Guru Ramdas, and Mohan were with him. Mohan, Guru Amardas’ son was a happy-go-lucky person and was in Divine love. Baba Shri Chand saw his own reflection in him as he was also a Guru’s son. Baba Shri Chand in between the conversation dropped the idea of adopting Mohan, as Baba Shri Chand grew a liking for Mohan. Guru Amardas happily gave his son to Baba Shri Chand. He said if you have liked him, you could keep him. Guru Sahib was so kind that he gave his son with his own hands. Baba Shri Chand took the time to speak his mind, but Guru Sahib did not take any time to give him. How can anyone say that Baba Shri Chand was angry with *gurughar*. This also proves the point the followers of *Udasi* cult have enormous faith in the teachings and preaching of Sikh Gurus and they respect them as they respect Baba Shri Chand.

Guru Ramdas was born in 1534 AD. He lived in Lahore. He was the fourth Sikh Guru and he passed away in 1581 AD. Baba Shri Chand was 80 years old when Guru Ramdas became the fourth Guru. Baba Shri Chand once visited Guru Ramdas just to know whether he respect him or not. He established his *dhuna* outside the city. When Guru Ramdas got to know about his visit, he went ahead with gifts to welcome him. He touched his feet and gave him respect. Guru Ramdas was young at that time. His beard was quite long. Baba Shri Chand thought of a mischief. He saw and commented on his long beard, why have you kept this long beard? The Guru answered politely that it is to clean the feet of great souls like Baba Shri Chand. While saying he took his beard and went ahead to clean his feet. Baba Shri Chand immediately got up from his seat and hugged the Guru and said your politeness and humble nature has made you able to be Guru Nanak's successor. You truly deserve the *gaddi* of the father, Guru Nanak. Your humble is unparalleled and endless. They both conversed about Divine knowledge and their bond became strong. They deliberated about the construction of *Chak Ramdas*. The Guru returned to *Chak Ramdas* after his meeting with Baba Shri Chand. Both shared a mutual respect and faith. This is the reason that even today *Akhara 'Brahm Buta'* and *Akhara 'Mangal Wala'* are Shri Amritsar *Darbar*. People visit these places and to pay their homage.

Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the fifth Sikh Guru and the first martyr in the Sikh tradition, was born in 1563 AD in Guru Ramdas's house. He in 1605 AD drank the goblet of martyrdom in the reign of Jahangir. He succeeded his father as the fifth Sikh Guru in 1581 AD. At this time, Baba Shri Chand was 87 years old. The Guru thought of compiling the *Banni* of his predecessors and people from every caste into one scripture, as he himself created *Banni*. Around 1598, Guru Arjan Dev visited *Barath Sahib* to meet Baba Shri Chand with gifts, money and horses as offering. The Guru was working on his creation *Sukhmani Sahib*. Baba Shri Chand spent a large time of his life in *Barath Sahib*. Baba Ji was sitting near his *dhuna*. He touched his feet. They both had a long conversation about Spiritual and Divine power. When the Guru informed him about his endeavour of compilation, Baba Shri Chand became very happy and said your endeavour is of great kind. He further asked him whether he too was creating *Baani* according to the tradition set by the earlier four Gurus. He said that the *Baani* was created according to worship to the Gurus, if he asks, he can recite that for them. Baba said that worship of Gurus is the worship of God. There is nothing better than that. Guru Arjun then recited the first 16 *ashatpadis* from *Sukhmani Sahib*. Baba Shri Chand got very happy. After listening to 16 *ashatpadis*, Guru paused and said to Baba, "You are the son of the Guru, after this, the influence of *Banni* has stopped because he was very close to God. Kindly permit me to continue it further." Baba closed his eyes and recited the starting verse of 17 *ashatpadis* saying the aphorism, "*aad sacch jugaad sacch hai bhi sacch nanak hosi bhi sacch.*" He recited it from the *Banni* of his father Guru Nanak Dev Ji. This proves the fact that Baba Shri Chand did not like to be at par with the Sikh gurus. But, he also wanted to further their

tradition and rituals. Therefore, after uttering these two *shlokas* he indicated the Guru to add 8 more *ashatpadis*, and said this *Banni*, whom you have entitled as *Sukhmani Sahib* would, in a true manner be the *Banni* of happiness. From all this, we can infer that Baba Shri Chand and Guru Arjan Dev shared deep and cordial relationship.

Nowadays, we recite *Sukhmani Sahib* for almost two hours a day, but have forgotten about those who have contributed in its creation. We hate even the words like saint, even though this is a definite example of praise for a saint.

From the ten Sikh Gurus, two Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh (grandfather-grandson) had to succeed the *gurgaddi* in a relatively small age. Their father sacrificed themselves to safeguard the religion. Guru Hargobind succeeded Guru Arjan in 1605, after latter's martyrdom. Baba Shri Chand was more than a century old at that time. Guru Hargobind, alongside his sons- Baba Gurditta, Ali Rai, Suraj Mal and Tegh Bahadur- visited Barath Sahib to meet him. He offered him gifts, money, clothes and horses. Afterwards, Guru Hargobind sat with Baba Shri Chand, where his *dhuna* was lit. In the conversation Baba Shri Chand asked about Guru Sahib's sons. Guru Sahib told him about the early demise of his one son- Attal Rai and the other four sons. Baba Shri Chand showed the wish to make one of Guru's son his successor. He told the guru about his old age and expressed the wish to amalgamate the cult to that mainstream from which it originated. Therefore, he asked the Guru to a follower out of his sons. Guru Hargobind happily offered all of his sons to him. Baba Shri Chand looked carefully at all of them and then chose Baba Gurditta as his successor after a careful analysis. Historians are of the view that Baba Gurditta looked like Guru Nanak. Therefore, he chose him. Baba Gurditta was married at that time. Guru Hargobind happily gave him to Baba Shri Chand. Sikh Gurus hearts were filled with reverence and love for Baba Shri Chand.

Baba Gurditta, after becoming the disciple of Baba Shri Chand, served him for the last six years of his life. Baba Shri Chand always had a relation with *gurughar* and Sikh Gurus also visited him at Barath Sahib and had respect for him. The journey of almost a century and half, which Baba Shri Chand and Sikh Gurus travelled side by side, came to a halt with the demise of Baba Shri Chand in 1643 AD. The last meeting of Baba Shri Chand, with a Sikh Guru was with Guru Hargobind Sahib.

The discussed history proves the point that even Baba Shri Chand founded a different cult, still the whole of his life he strived to lead his life on the principles of Guru Nanak, alongside his decisions. He was not jealous of the Sikh Gurus but had cordial and affectionate relationships with them. He always met them with a big-heart and would bless them. He gave his support for the growth and

development of the *Panth*, which Guru Nanak Dev initiated. He chose Bhai Gurditta, the elder son of Guru Hargobind, his successor.

Leaders of *Udasi* cult have full faith in Sikhism that's why every *dera* has Guru Granth Sahib. One would not be exaggerating while saying that the result of the whole life's endeavour of Baba Shri Chand is that the followers of the *Udasi* cult, those who visit *deras* and pay their services in the form of *Langar*, keeps Sikh Gurus and Baba Shri Chand at one pedestal. *Udasi* saints kept the honour of Sikh religion with preaching about *Gurmat* in the time of grave danger especially between the years 1708-1900 AD. These saints wrote an important *Granth* to preach about Sikh religion. During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, these *Udasis* were leaving their impact. Kings granted lands to these *Udasi* saints, which made them corrupt. They began preaching their own ideals in the *deras*. Gurudwara *Sudhar Lehar* was a result of this. Under this movement, Gurudwaras were snatched away from *Mahants* and the administration of these came under *Gurudwara Prabandhak* Committee. These resulted in the slow pace of preaching about the religion. Still these saints are preaching about the religion as per their capability. After Baba Shri Chand, these *Mahants* kept full faith in Sikhism and preached about *Gurmat*. These *Mahants* also were part of the army of Guru Gobind Singh. They attained martyrdom in the battles fighting for him. Baba Gurditta sent four of his followers – Balu Hasna, Almast, Phul Sahib, and Goind Sahib. The places these four people established came into being as four important places for *Udasi* cult, and exist even today. The places are known as Balu Hasna-*Cahran Kaul* (near Anandpur Sahib), Almast- *Nanak Mata*, Phul Sahib- Bahadurpur, District Hoshiarpur, and Goind Sahib- *Sangal Wala Akhara*, Amritsar.

In this way Baba Shri Chand started a new *gaddi*. It was impossible to give it a space in the Sikh religion. Baba Shri Chand's relations with the later Sikh Gurus were cordial and during the Khalsa struggle looked after the *gurudwaras*. Afterwards, they became astray from the principles of Sikh religion and Sikhs indulged themselves in another movement to take the *gurudwaras* away from the *Mahants*.

However, the character of Baba Shri Chand clears the point that he preached the idea of humanism and imagined about a nation, a place where people can live with self-reliance, self-respect, and independence. A place where people can live and fight for their rights in a unified way. He also thought of a place where people would always remember the name of the lord and worship Him. His *bani* '*Matra*' contains many thoughts that carry forward the ideology and principles of Guru Nanak Dev.

Baba Shri Chand gave a new life to *Udasi* cult alongside serving the society, nation and Hindu religion. He preached about Sikhism under the guidance of Guru Granth Sahib. He also scripted many copies of Guru Granth Sahib and he, on foot keeping those copies on his head, delivered those at different places. He also contributed in the dangerous work of digging up a 150 meter long canal to fill the *sarowar* of Amritsar for four years.

Almost all the *Udasi* saints respects Sikhism and Sikh principles and goes to their limits to respect and preach about the principles of Sikhism and Guru Granth Sahib. Although, we cannot consider *Udasis* as part of Sikh religion, but we have to accept the fact that at no place they either went against or abused Sikh religion, ideology, and principles. We know the fact that Guru Nanak Dev and all of his successors worked to make people aware of their condition. He wanted them to realise the fact that to make this society beautiful is also their responsibility. If the *Udasi deras* or *Akharas* are working in the direction of welfare of society and its inhabitants, it would never mean that they are going away from the philosophy of Sikh religion or are working against it.

We know one thing for sure that Guru Nanak Dev and almost all of his successors wanted to awaken the morally sleeping people to provide them with good life. They wanted people to realise the fact that the people living in a society has the responsibility to safeguard their society from degradation. If the *Udasi deras* are working to give a definite direction to the society then it does not mean that they have gone against the philosophy of Sikh religion and are working against their ideology.

If we go to the *deras* of Jalandhar and listen to the ideas of the *Mahants* there, we would get to know that their sole ambition is to establish and construct an ideal society. They want to work then through this society of such kind that would not only encourage and establish the ideals of welfare of the people but would strengthen them simultaneously working on to establish the true reality of the religion.

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