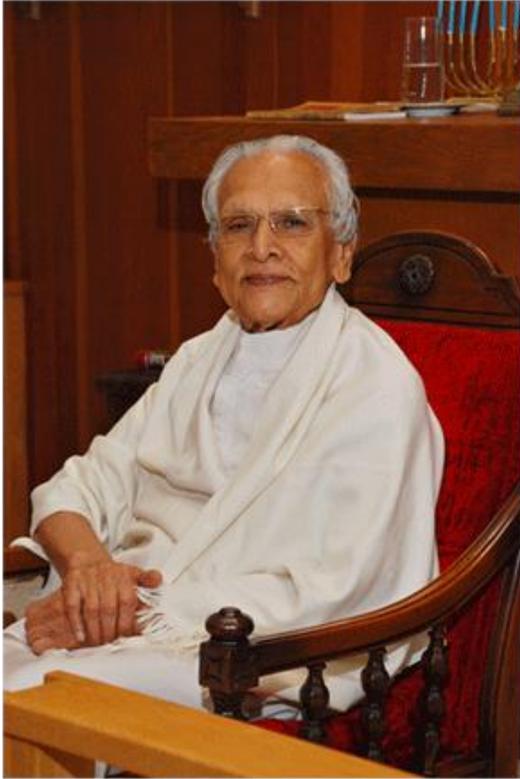


LIFE STORY – GURUDEV CHITRABHANUJI



This July, we will be celebrating 95th Birthday of Gurudev Shri Chitrabhanuji who is in a remarkably high spirit and good health. To understand his amazing life story, let's look at his unique life of struggles and achievements.

He was born on July 26, 1922, as Rup-Rajendra into a devout Jain family in a small town of Takhatgadh, Rajasthan. His parents were overjoyed to have been blessed with a healthy and happy child since their two earlier offspring, a boy and a girl, had not survived past their 1st birthday.

Rup Rajendra grew up in a town called Tumkur near Bengaluru where his father had a small clothing store. When he was three years old, he gained a little sister named Magi. A year later, mother Chunibai passed away. Tragedy struck again when Rup was only eleven and he lost his beloved sister to an illness.

As a young man, Rup was a good student but a lost soul.

He confronted his inner demons like irrational fears and

bad habits. He struggled with a long bout of illness that weakened him and threw him into a state of depression. When he recovered his father encouraged him to go on pilgrimages. During his travels, he joined India's freedom movement under Subhas Chandra Bose, got arrested and endured brutal beating in the jail. When he was released, he resumed his search for answers. Visited Shri Aurobindo's ashram in Pondicherry, met with Spiritual leaders like Raman Maharishi, visited with Acharya Shri Bhakti Suri in Palitana but still answers eluded him. He became an avid reader of religious books and Gujarati literature.

In his college days, he found a soulmate named Usha, a pretty girl in her class but that relationship did not last long as Usha also passed away soon.

Rup concluded that happiness in life could only be found in the life of a monkhood. On February 6th of 1942, at the age of 20, Rup accepted monkhood and was given a new name of Muni Chandraprabh Sagar. His father joined him in monkhood a few months later and they traveled together in the State of Gujarat for seventeen years as a Guru and a disciple until that fateful day – July 26, 1959, Birthday of Muni Chandraprabh Sagarji, his father passed away peacefully in his laps. Muni Shri decided to move to Mumbai.

In Mumbai, Muni Shri became increasingly popular for his eloquence in explaining Jain Dharma. So many came to listen to his discourses that no auditorium could hold his crowds. At times his meetings were held at the Chowpatty beach where tens of thousands of his devotees waited for hours to hear him. But the increased popularity only made the Muni Shri restless. But four walls of the temples had rules on what may be preached as a sectarian monk he was. Muni Shri

adopted a pen name of "Chitrabhanu" and started writing columns under that name in newspapers and magazines. To the Jains, Chitrabhanuji's columns appeared to have come out of nowhere but the message of charity and humanitarian services appealed to even larger readership. Among his devotees, there were many foreigners who wanted to learn from him. Gurudev Chitrabhanuji's fame had reached deep into the spiritual world. They invited Gurudev Chitrabhanuji to speak at the 1970 Second World Spiritual conference in Geneva.

Traveling overseas on an airplane was forbidden not just for the Jain monks but was frowned upon even for householders. But Gurudev Chitrabhanuji decided to take Mahavir's message to the western world, attended the Geneva conference, traveled to France, UK, Hague, Switzerland and Africa and in 1971 landed in America.

Gurudev Chitrabhanuji's arrival in America was the most significant event for the Jains of North America. He was later joined by Muni Shri Sushil Kumarji and together they inspired formation of JAINA in 1972. Rest of Gurudev Chitrabhanuji's story is indeed the history of Jainism in North America.

A new book written by Dilip V. Shah - Philadelphia, on Gurudev Chitrabhanuji's 95 years journey of Ahimsa - "Man of The Millennium" is scheduled to be inaugurated at the 2017 JAINA Convention in New Jersey.