

holder who is simply lost in the wilderness of worldly duties. It is next to impossible for a householder to follow the strict principles of restraint enunciated in the 'Astanga Yoga' of Patanjali. The processes in the Kriyayoga taught by Lahiri Mahashaya make us gradually fit to unfold the Divine within ourselves, with much less effort than is usually necessary. Individual Yogis have always been there in India, but due to a great general deterioration in the mass consciousness (owing to the rules of Nature which will be explained in the Appendix) Yogic processes remained circumscribed in the hands of Yogis alone. It was much too difficult for the common man to follow. Only those who would be ready to dedicate their lives to the cause of the Divine, would be initiated into the cult. Naturally, their number was very small. The greatest section of the people had no opportunity to follow the principles of Yoga even if they might have eagerness for these. It was Yogiraj Shri Shri Shyama-charan Lahiri Mahashaya who felt for us at the heart of his heart and spread the Divine Kriyayoga at a time when the world was just getting ripe for a new era of spiritual synthesis.

Besides, from another point of view, the advent of Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya has a great significance. Through many bloody and terrible wars, the world now-a-days is slowly reaching towards the ideal of international amity and brotherhood. This ideal must be realised, if the human race is to persist against the atomic and rocket aggression. The great intellectuals and humanists are already striving after establishing peace in the world. Innumerable creeds, social, political and humanitarian, have sprung

up. But they cannot give a lasting security against destructive wars. Science with its so many blessings is still paving the way to destruction. The creeds are clashing against one another, much to the bewilderment of the common man. None of them places men of different climes and countries on a common footing. Religion of course teaches men that they are all children of the same God and therefore they are brethren. And yet for lack of knowledge of the essential unity of all religions men have always quarrelled with the outer differences amongst them. Kriyayoga teaches man that God is to be discovered in his own body first, concentrating his gaze on the point between his eye-brows.

“ईश्वरः सर्वभूतानां हृद्देशेऽर्जुन तिष्ठति” said Shrikrishna in the Gita. Once man realises God within his own body, he automatically realises Him in others too. His body is the temple where he starts worshipping the Prana which controls the entire physical machinery. Each and everybody has this Pranavayu in common and by realising its mystery through Pranayama, etc., man realises the Supreme Consciousness that controls the universe, for it is the same force that impels the individual and the universe. Thus the Kriyayoga will go a great way in bringing about a sense of unity amongst all men and women, and ultimately in bringing about world peace. We are on the threshold of a new era. The immortal teachings of Lahiri Mahashaya came for us at the proper moment. Preparations have been going on, and we are surely ahead of a great spiritual resurgence of India and the world.

Apart from Rajayoga which is Yoga proper, there are 'Hathayoga', 'Mantrayoga' etc. Much stress should

not be given on Hathayoga, for the Yogic processes involved in it have as their consummation only physical development. A sound physique is certainly necessary for Sadhana, but that is not the be-all and end-all of a life of the spirit. Mantrayoga can certainly lead man to success, because through a constant chanting of the Mantras the Susumna is gradually opened up. That is why the words "जपात् सिद्धिर्जपात् सिद्धिर्जपात् सिद्धिर्न संशयः" are very true. But the opening of the Susumna through chanting of the Mantras is an indirect process, although it is easier for the common man. The Yogi makes the Susumna his starting point by taking recourse to different processes of controlling and canalising the Prana-vayu through the right path.

The liberality inherent in the Kriyayoga of Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya places it on a universal footing. A man practising the teachings of any cult may be initiated into Kriyayoga without the necessity of shaking off his own religious faith. Besides, Kriyayoga may be given to any man having eagerness for Self-Realization, to whichever caste, creed or country he may belong. Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya had Abdul Gafur Khan as one of his advanced disciples, and Swami Bhaskarananda Saraswati and Shrimat Balananda Brahmachari were two Saints belonging to other religious cults who received Kriyayoga from Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya.

The Kriyayoga propounded by Lahiri Mahashaya is based on the principles enunciated in the *Shrimad-bhagavadgita*, and the *Yogasutra* of the great sage Patanjali. Lahiri Baba gave Yogic interpretations to some 22 famous Shastras including the two above-mentioned ones. They will be duly mentioned at the end of this book. The Gita, however, was considered to be

the most important. It is a compendium of all kinds of spiritual training.

But, after all, Shastras are the records of spiritual researches conducted by Great Saints. Unless one follows the teachings of the Shastras in practice, one cannot have the experience of the Divine Bliss. That is why the mystery of Dharma has been described in the Gita as प्रत्यक्षावगमं, to be realised only by direct experience. Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya's Kriyayoga leads the Sadhaka to the final goal, each stage unfolding its peculiar effect and thus encouraging the seeker.

As the difficult processes of Rajayoga have been much simplified by the Yogiraj and his Great Master Shri Shri Babaji Maharaj, the Kriyayoga as propounded by them has been called the 'Sahaja Kriyayoga', that is, the Kriya that comes naturally to man, without putting any artificial strain on the physical machinery. This, again, is another point in favour of Kriyayoga that it is free from the dangers which sometimes come in the way of the Sadhaka in the shape of some physical distortion or disease, the outcome of mistakes in following the processes of Yoga. There is no such danger attending Kriyayoga even if one commits a mistake. Of course, Kriyayoga is 'Sahaja' (meaning literally 'that which originates at our very birth') also in the primary sense that it is a process where we have to take recourse to the regulation of breath, the process of inhalation and exhalation which is co-eval with the very being of man.

The advent of Lahiri Mahashaya had thus a great significance for the suffering humanity offering as he did a divine manna to the care-worn earth. Let us, in the next chapter, try to start with a brief account of his Life Divine, which can only be done through His Grace.

CHAPTER—II

Early Life : Before Diksa¹

Shri Shri Shyamacharan Lahiri Mahashaya was born on the 16th of Ashwin, 1235 Bengali Era, (1828A.D.) at the village Ghurni in the district of Nadia in Bengal. His birthdate was not at first exactly known. It was, however, discovered after much research and enquiry into the diaries of the Yogiraj by his grandsons Acharya Sj. Anandamohan Lahiri and Sj Abhoycharan Lahiri. It was their family tradition to burn the horoscope after the death of a man. We have, therefore, no horoscope of the Yogiraj Sj. Abhoycharan Lahiri, however, had made it prepared by Pandit Shri Yageshwar Pathak, a Maharastrian astrologer at Benares. From this also it is evident that the boy would be a great saviour of the suffering humanity. The father of Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya was Sj. Gourmohan Lahiri Sarkar, the famous landlord of Ghurni, and his mother was Shrimati Muktakeshi Devi, the second wife of Sj Gourmohan.

The origin of the Lahiri family is to be sought as far back as the great sage Shandilya, the author of *Bhaktisutra* and *Yogasutra*. In Bengal the history of the family is to be traced from Yogiraj Bhattanarayana² who came over to Bengal from Kanyakubja (the present Kanpur) with four other sages at the request of Adishur, the then King of Bengal. Thus, it seems, there was a latent tradition of Yoga in the family of Yogiraj Shri Shri Shyamacharan Lahiri Mahashaya which was hinted at by Mahavatar Shri Shri Babaji Maharaj after his Diksa³.

1. Initiation.

2. The ancestry of Rabindranath Tagore, too, goes back to Bhattanarayana.

3. Mentioned in Chapter III.

One of the 13th descendants from Bhattanarayana, Joysagar by name, was the originator of the Barendra Brahmins. At the arrangement of Ballal Sen the famous king of the Sen dynasty of Bengal, the tract of land at the north of the river Padma and in between the Karatoya and Kushi was called Rajsahi Barendra Bhum ('Bhumi', land). It was because Joysagar settled in this land that his family came to be known as Barendra Brahmins. The family of Yogiraj Shri Shri Shyamacharan Lahiri Mahashaya was also known as the Lahiris of Nakair, as Keshava the twenty-first person from Bhattanarayana settled in the village Nakair.

The surname Lahiri came to be attached to the family after they received a village named Lahiri in the district of Bagura from the hands of the king at the time of Sj. Pitambar Sharma. The surname was used first by Sj Lokenath Lahiri, son of Pitambar.

The 30th descendant from Bhattanarayana was Thakur Durgadas Lahiri, an inhabitant of the village Halsia near Rajsahi, who inherited the estates of Kalagachhia near Murshidabad after the death of his father-in-law Raja Shambhuchandra Roy who had no other issue excepting the wife of Durgadas. One of the sons of Thakur Durgadas Lahiri was Shrihari who became a Dewan of the then reigning Nabab and received the title Sarkar. Henceforth his descendants used the surname Lahiri Sarkar. Yogiraj Shyamacharan, however, did not use the title Sarkar.

Due to some clash with the Natore Raj family, Sj. Ramballabh Lahiri Sarkar lost the Kalagachhia estates and came over to Krisnanagore in the district of Nadia at the shelter of Raja Raghuram Roy where he

became a courtier. It is said that Ramballabh on horseback gave a round over his selected plot of land and thus he received it from the Raja. From this round ('Ghuran' in Bengali) the name of the village became 'Ghurni'. Ramballabh's son Sj. Shibcharan Lahiri Sarkar was the grandfather of the Yogiraj. He was a great artist and the originator of the famous clay-models of Ghurni.

The only purpose of going into this complicated genealogy of the Lahiri family is to show that our Yogiraj was born in a family which was rich in both spiritual and material acquisitions. And this certainly gave his character an aristocracy of its own, a natural gravity and independence of spirit. The constant change of place from Kanauj to Kashi (Benares) where the family settled in the childhood of Shri Shyamacharan may also be an indication of the fact that the spirit of man has no limitations of space and time, that although the birthplace of a man is hallowed by sacred memories, the Yogi has his home in all climes and places. As Tagore has sung : "I have my home everywhere and yet I am seeking for that, alas." The family tradition, therefore, made it eminently possible that one of the greatest Yogis of modern India would be born here*.

Shri Shyamacharan's father Sj. Gourmohan was a great devotee of Lord Shiva and he established a Shiva Temple in his village. The temple, however, was completely washed away by a great flood of the river

Jalangi or Khore by the side of which the village Ghurni was situated. The flood also destroyed the house and most of the estates of Gourmohan at the early childhood of Shri Shyamacharan. After this flood-havoc Gourmohan finally settled at Benares where he already had a temporary residence. His eldest son Chandrakanta was at that time living at Benares. It is said that some time after the flood, a woman in the village in her dream was told by Lord Shiva about the exact location where his image was drowned. At her words, people in the village searched out the holy image and installed it in a new temple built for the purpose. The place even now goes by the name of Shibtala at Ghurni.

It is very significant that Lahiri Baba was born in the district of Nadia where a few hundred years back Mahaprabhu Shri Gouranga appeared with his grand message of universal love. The house of Shri Gouranga, too, has gone completely under the water of the Jalangi, a branch of the Ganga. The spiritual glory of these Saints is what is immortal. What they had in the shape of material possessions have gone the way of impermanence. Is it again an indication given to the world about the vanity of all earthly things ?

Sj. Gourmohan was a virtuous man who read the *Rigveda* everyday. At Benares he engaged Nagabhata, a great Vedic scholar, as a tutor to Shri Shyamacharan. The Vedic simplicity and austerity in the character of Lahiri Mahashaya was therefore as much inherited as acquired.

The child Shyamacharan was, strangely enough, not at all restless like other boys of his own age. He would often come unnoticed to the riverside and

*Anybody interested in the detailed genealogical table of the Yogiraj family may kindly consult the biographies of the Yogiraj written by Sj. Anandamohan and Sj. Abhoycharan Lahiri.

meditate with closed eyes and a lotus posture. He would also sink neck-deep into the sand of the riverside so that his mother might not easily take him home. The women in the neighbourhood would compare him with the Yogishwara Lord Shiva at such moments of meditation.

Mrinmayi Devi, Gourmohan's first wife, died on the way to some holy pilgrimage. She had two sons, Chandrakanta and Saradaprasad, and a daughter named Swarnamayi. Gourmohan's second wife Shrimati Muktakeshi Devi had Shyamacharan as her only son and Sulaksana Devi as her only daughter.

It was in 1237 B.S.¹ that the flood destroyed the house of Gourmohan and also the Shiva temple established by him. On Baishakh 19, 1238, however, he established three Shiva-temples at 49 Ganesh Mahalla, Benares. The devotion to Shiva who is taken as the greatest master of the Yogis did not go unrewarded, as we find that the great Yogi Shyamacharan was called the 'Living Vishwanatha'² in his later life by the people of Benares, the city of the Lord Vishwanatha. Shyamacharan's mother, too, was a pious lady who did not take a single morsel of food before worshipping Shiva everyday.

On Agrahayana 2, 1238 B. S., Gourmohan came to Benares with family. On Bhadra 4, 1239 B. S., he went to Ghurni for the last time. On Pous 13, 1240, he left with the entire family for Benares where he reached on Falgun 18 (1834 A. D.). Henceforward, he settled permanently at Benares. For some five years the family lived in different parts of the city. At last, in 1245 B.S.,

1. B. S. : Bengali 'Sal', i.e., Bengali Era.

2. Vishwanatha is just another name for Shiva. It means the 'Lord of the Universe'.

Radhanath, the nephew of Gourmohan, purchased the house No. D/32/242 at Madanpura. It was at this house that the major portion of the student life of Shri Shyamacharan was spent. The house exists even now.

The first lessons of Yogiraj Shyamacharan started at a 'Pathashala' (a primary school where only elementary lessons are given) at a place called Telibari near the Garureshwar Shiva temple at Benares where he used to go in company with his cousin Shashi. Next he went to the Joynarayan School established by Joynarayan Ghosal, the Zamindar of Bhukailas, in 1818. Gourmohan was liberal enough to understand the value of English Education in modern times. In the Joynarayan School, however, Hinduism was unnecessarily condemned by some of the Christian Missionaries and attempts were made to convert the students into Christianity. However, at the age of twelve Shri Shyamacharan left this school and joined the English School under the Government Sanskrit College, Benares. Here he learnt English, Hindi, Urdu and some Persian. Bengali he had to learn at home. Bengali was not a compulsory subject in schools at Benares and that explains the Hindi writings in his diaries in the Bengali script.

The first lessons of the Yogiraj in Sanskrit were learnt from his father himself. After that Gourmohan appointed Nagabhatta, a Marathi tutor, who was well-versed in the Shastras. Shyamacharan studied the *Rigveda*, the *Upanisads* and other scriptures with him.

The English school where Shri Shyamacharan used to read was later converted into a College affiliated under the Cambridge University. Shyamacharan left