



Yogiguru Shrimat Brahmachari Anilanandaji Maharaj

Anilanandaji knows no rest in fulfilling the task entrusted to him by his Master. He moves about everywhere, inspiring Faith and Love even in those who are averse to the Divine. One of the main centres established by him is the branch of Shrigurudham at 166, Belilios Road, Kadamtala, Howrah—1.

Yogishwar Shrimat Matilal Thakur has also been a great author of religious books including his *Atma-Katha* (Autobiography) which has been posthumously published by his disciple Shrimat Brahmachari Maharaj.

The name of Shrimat Paramhansa Yogananda Giriji Maharaj has spread through every corner of the world. It is through him that Shri Yuktेश्वar has made a gift of Shri Shri Lahiri Baba's message to the West—a duty which was entrusted to him by the Great Shri Shri Babaji Maharaj. Yoganandaji's father S. J. Bhagavati Charan Ghosh was a very high officer in the Railway. Once he refused to grant leave to one of his subordinates who wanted to go to his Gurudeva Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya. Strangely enough, Bhagavati found the divine figure of the Yogiraj appear before him. "Bhagavati, you are very hard on your subordinates," said he. Henceforward Bhagavati turned a very devoted disciple to Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya. Yoganandaji (Mukunda was his name before he adopted sannyasa) was laid at the feet of the Yogiraj when he was a mere child and the Master prophesied before the mother. "your son will be an engine (for propagating the ideas of the Divine) in his later life." The prophecy came true. The divine engine in the frame of Shrimat Yoganandaji has been able to move even the hearts of those who were simply steeped in material civilization.

And a great American product from his hand even now holds the sway of the Self-Realization Fellowship in the shape of President Daya Mata who graced the motherland of her Master for the first time by her loving and august visit in 1958.

Another great disciple of Shrimat Swami Shri Yuktेश्वर Giriji Maharaj is Shrimat Swami Satyananda Giriji Maharaj who has still been ministering to the spiritual needs of millions and has given a concrete shape to Shri Yuktेश्वर's ideal of synthesis in his Ashram 'Sevayatan' at Jhargram, Midnapore (West Bengal), which combines the best in eastern and western culture. He is also an author of many books including the lives of Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya and Shrimat Swami Shri Yuktेश्वर in Bengali.

Shrimat Panchanan Bhattacharya, the founder of the Arya Mission, was one of the earliest disciples of Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya. It was through him that most of the interpretations of Shri Shri Lahiri Baba on the scriptures had been recorded and published. He himself was the author of many books including *Jagat O Ami* ("The world and I").

The teachings of Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya found another able exponent in Shrimat Swami Pranavananda Giriji Maharaj whose great disciple Shrimat Jnanendranath Mukhopadhyaya, interpreter of the *Pranava-Gita*, is still in our midst, shedding spiritual lustre over all around him.

But to come back to the Yogiraj himself. Although he shunned public gaze, the divine 'Leela' of

Shri Shyamacharan spread far and near, without distinction of caste, creed or community. His superior officer in the office, too, was not deprived of his Grace. This Englishman had a soft corner for this efficient assistant who, even in the midst of multifarious duties in the office would always remain absent-minded, concentrated as he was in the Divine, thus earning for himself the title "Pagla Babu" (the eccentric Babu). Shri Shri Lahiri Baba once found him very depressed and asked him the cause of his depression. The officer told him that his wife had fallen very ill in England and he did not receive any news of her for a long time. The Yogiraj took pity on him and gave him the news of her recovery. He also quoted a few lines from her letter which was yet to be received by the officer. Later on, when the officer actually received the letter, he was surprised by discovering the language of "Pagla Babu" in the same. When, after some time, the lady came over to India, she could at once recognise the Yogiraj as the man whom she had seen at her bedside during illness and due to whose grace she recovered. The officer was highly pleased to find such an exceptional Yogi in his own office.

After his own initiation at Ranikhet Shri Shri Lahiri Baba served the Government for some twenty-five years more. During his service life not many had the privilege of receiving initiation from him. It was only after his retirement, when he settled at Benares, that innumerable people came to take shelter under his divine Grace. Once or twice he had occasion to go to Krisnanagore and to Bisnupur in the district of Bankura in Bengal where his second son was married. He had also probably made a sojourn towards Munghyr

and Bhagalpur. Even now, many Sadhakas are to be found in these places, specially at Bisnupur, who keep their Sadhana hidden from public gaze.

The Yogiraj once told a disciple about his own picture, "It will be your God if you believe, and a mere picture if you don't". Some time later there was a sudden thunderfall near the house of that disciple. A daughter-in-law of the Yogiraj was present there at the time. She and a devoted woman of the house prayed earnestly before the picture of the Yogiraj for averting the danger. The thunderbolt fell on the same house, but the devotees were saved. They felt as if somebody had anointed them with cold ice which protected them from the deadly heat of thunder.

A lady disciple of Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya once prayed at his feet for saving her children in future. So far, unfortunately, she had no child alive. Lahiri Baba asked her to keep a strict watch over the lamp which burns in the room of the child's birth. In due time the lady gave birth to a child. A nurse, too, was engaged to look after the lamp which ought to have been kept burning all through the night. Towards the dawn, however, the tired mother and the nurse fell rather sleepy and the lamp was gradually going out. The door was closed from inside. Suddenly, however, the door banged open and the sleep of the women broke off. Surprised, they found the Gracious figure of the Yogiraj standing inside the room, silently pointing his finger towards the failing light of the lamp. At once they put the wick right and the lamp regained its lustre. But where was the Yogiraj? There was no trace of him in the

entire room. He only appeared for granting life to the child by making his devotee obey his command. The purpose was served and the child lived on. As a matter of fact, all his disciples considered him to be their only shelter in times of danger.

Shrimat Swami Shri Yuktेश्वर Giriji Maharaj once begged for the life of one of his friends. The Yogiraj at first asked him to get him treated by a doctor. But, the doctors gave no hope and Swamiji prayed insistently for his friend's life. At last his gurudeva gave him just a small bottle of Neem Oil (Oil Margosa) and asked him to administer a few drops to his friend. On coming back from his Shrigurudeva Shri Yuktेश्वर found no sign of life in his friend. He grew indignant over his Master. Did he jest with him over the question of life and death of a man? However, he obeyed the Master's command and put a few drops of the oil through the lips of the dead. Great Heavens! what was the result? The friend gradually opened his eyes, and, few moments later, came to the Yogiraj in company with Shri Yuktेश्वर to render obeisance to his Lotus Feet. As the Yogiraj later explained to Shri Yuktेश्वर, the Neem Oil was just an excuse for the satisfaction of Shri Yuktेश्वर. His divine grace was the real medicine.

A lady devotee started for Benares for sitting at the Feet of her Master. While she was still on her way to the station, the train whistled. The lady prayed to her Shriguru with earnest devotion. Suddenly, the driver found that the train did not move an inch, although the wheels were revolving. After a thorough investigation which naturally took a long time, it was

found that a screw had somehow got loose and that was the cause of all the trouble. However, during this hubbub, the lady had ample time to board the train. Just after she had finished her Pranam on reaching Benares, the Yogiraj smilingly advised her to be more punctual in her future journeys. What punctilious care for every detail in his discipies' lives and what a Grace to shower them with !

On the other hand there are many anecdotes to show how Shri Shri Lahiri Baba snapped the pride of people who had any form of vanity. Sj. Gangadhar Dey was a great painter and photographer of those times. The Yogiraj was generally averse to allowing his photograph being taken. However, at the modest prayer of his disciples he agreed to pose before the camera. Before the snapshot was actually taken, he asked Gangadhar Babu about the method of photography. Gangadhar too explained the science of photography with great enthusiasm. A few moments later the snap was actually taken. But, to his utter surprise, Gangadhar Babu found that there was no reflection of the Yogiraj on the plate. He thoroughly examined his apparatus and experimented with other people, but no irregularity could be discovered. The Yogiraj was smiling a naughty smile. He asked the photographer, "what does your science tell you?" Gangadhar Babu was astounded. He understood that the power of material science is as nothing compared to the power of Yoga. Besides, the Yogiraj had attained an infinity which could not be circumscribed within the plate of a camera. However, Gangadhar Babu prostrated himself before this great Yogi and said, "Let science be damned My pride has been shattered. Now be so kind as to

allow your reflection to be caught in the camera." The Yogiraj agreed, and the photograph so familiar to us had its birth. The first prints were of a very small size, one of which may still be found in his house on the wall opposite his seat in the drawing room. Gangadhar Babu enlarged the first print later on in water-colour which was preserved by Sj. Abhoycharan Lahiri. He also prepared an oil-painting of the Yogiraj from this enlarged photograph.

Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya had a disciple named Sj. Rammohan Dey whose younger brother Chandramohan passed brilliantly from the Lahore Medical College. Chandramohan, as instructed by his elder brother, came to offer Pranams to the Yogiraj and to receive his blessings. Lahiri Baba blessed him gladly from the heart of his heart. Chandramohan was narrating the recent developments in medical science and the extent to which he himself had imbibed them. Suddenly, the Yogiraj asked him about the signs which could distinguish the dead from the living. Chandramohan told him what he knew. Now the Yogiraj just stretched out his arm before the doctor and asked him to feel his pulse. Strangely enough, there was no beat in the pulse. Chandramohan brought forth a stethoscope and thoroughly examined his chest. But, no, there was no heart-beat as well. And yet, Shri Shri Thakur was talking to him. After a good deal of meditation Chandramohan at last recalled a saying in his text-book that the signs of death enumerated there would not necessarily be applicable to the Yogis in India. The Yogiraj admonished him saying that Knowledge is limitless and therefore Chandramohan should always believe that he had learnt only very little

ann the Vast Ocean of Knowledge was always lying before him. The instruction from the Yogiraj deeply influenced the young physician, and, by constant pursuit of knowledge, he later on became one of the foremost medical practitioners of his age in North-West India.

A great instance of the breaking of vanity is supplied by the episode of Kaviraj (a physician practising the Ayurvedic¹ method of treatment) Pareshnath Roy who was a student of Gangadhar Sen, one of the greatest practitioners in Ayurveda. Kaviraj Pareshnath acquired great wealth and fame as a physician and scholar. But, added to his vast learning was also his great pride which made people quake in fear before him. Once it so happened that S. Rajchandra Sanyal, brother-in-law of Shri Shri Thakur, took him to this Paresh Kaviraj. The Kaviraj had written an annotation on Charaka, the great sage who wrote on medical science. He was reading out his annotation before a distinguished assembly of scholars and medical men all of whom praised it very highly. Finding the Yogiraj alone silent in the company, Pareshnath asked his impression about the book. Shri Shyamacharan gently replied, "It is entirely wrong". The people present there became afraid of the Kaviraj flaring up. Pareshnath was astounded for a moment. Nobody heretofore had the courage to utter such words before him. Angry and surprised, he asked the Yogiraj, "What do you know of this subject ?" Again, the Yogiraj answered with a gentle smile, "O Yes, I know everything," and returned home.

A few days passed, days of great mental torture for the Kaviraj. Then he came to Shri Shyamacharan

1. 'Ayurveda' is the indigenious medical science of India.

and submitted that his Professor Gangadhar Sen, after explaining Charaka, had actually told him that apart from his explanation, Charaka has some deeper significance which only a Yogi can explain. However, Pareshnath was eventually initiated by the Yogiraj and was counted among his most devoted disciples. The spiritual interpretation of Charaka as explained by Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya was printed at some later date. Pareshnath gradually attained to the state of Samadhi and just because the Yogiraj had to go to his house for breaking his Samadhi and making him regain his normal state of consciousness, he actually purchased a house near that of his Master and shifted there. Before his death Pareshnath bequeathed the major portion of his property to S. Tinkari Lahiri, the eldest son of the Yogiraj, by a will. Such incidents serve to show that the Yogiraj came to this world in order to indicate that all earthly possessions, riches or scholarship, become meaningless unless they are made subservient to a spirit of devotion, a spirit of humility before the Divine. Then and then alone they can yield their proper fruits. Besides, the Kaviraj, apart from his pride, was a really worthy man and the Yogiraj just showered his Grace upon him and changed the course of his life to the proper direction under the guise of breaking his vanity.

Once a man with a disreputable character came to the Yogiraj with a challenging attitude. As soon as he entered the room the Yogiraj asked his disciples to close their eyes. He would show them all a magic, he said. The newcomer too felt curious and closed his eyelids. Strangely enough, everybody present in the room had a similar experience. They all saw a

lady clad in a coloured Sari and asked their Master the reason for it. The Yogiraj smilingly explained that the lady in question was the mistress of the newcomer who had an immoral relation with her. The pride of the man went to pieces at this unexpected display of Shri Shyamacharan's Yogic powers. He now felt repentant for his attitude of challenge, laid himself at the Feet of the Master and asked for initiation. The Yogiraj agreed to initiate him if he could extricate himself from the lady at least for six months at a stretch. If he would not be able to do that, there would be no need for initiation, said the Yogiraj enigmatically. The man observed the abstinence for a few months, but could not maintain it for the stipulated period of time. Very soon he fell seriously ill and succumbed to death. Thus, the words of the Yogiraj that it would not be necessary to initiate the man unless he would practise abstinence for six months, proved very true.

Sj. Abhoycharan, the grandson of the Yogiraj, tells us of a great artisan disciple of Shri Shyamacharan named Subaran who joined the Franko-British Exhibition in England with his own woodcraft. The exhibition lasted for a long time, and Subaran came to India at regular intervals. After three such journeys to and back from England Subaran was once describing his experiences at the Fair and on the bosom of the Ocean. Incidentally, he said that inspite of so many journeys on the seas he had never had the experience of a typhoon which, according to the sailors, present an aspect of the terribly beautiful. Only a few days later of this description Subaran had to start again for England. This time, however, a great typhoon arose in the Arabian Sea. The ship was about to be drowned.

Everybody, including Subaran, was only thinking of saving his own life. The sailors asked the passengers to take the name of God. Subaran entered into a cabin nearby and with closed eyes prayed to the Gracious Lahiri Mahashaya. Suddenly, he heard the voice of his Master and was surprised beyond measure to see him face to face on opening his eyes. The Master asked him to come out of the cabin and watch the typhoon. Subaran felt ashamed of his desire and repeatedly prayed to excuse him. The Yogiraj rebuked him for being instrumental in endangering the lives of so many people. However, the storm had now almost subsided and Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya asked Subaran to watch the sublime and the terrible aspects of God combined into a typhoon.

Sj. Abhoycharan narrates an incident in which we come to know about Hitalal Sarkar, a golden-hearted disciple of the Yogiraj who served in a brick-making factory. He was all kindness to the poor and the distressed, and his excessive charity would sometimes be a cause of grief to his own family. He had only heard the name of the Yogiraj. Once at midday while supervising the work of the labourers, he felt a sudden and irresistible impulse for going somewhere he did not know. At once he had to start for the railway station. The booking clerk at the counter asked him about his destination. He, however, could not give the name of any place. Searching his pocket he found only Rupees eight and a few small coins. He wanted to have a ticket for any place which would be available within that amount. From the distracted appearance of Hitalal the middle-aged booking clerk had the impression that he was just searching out a place where

he could pacify his lacerated mind. He, therefore, gave Hitalal a ticket for Benares, a place hallowed with the name of Lord Vishwanatha where Saints congregate from all corners of India.

The train for Benares started. Hitalal did not know where to go. He got down at Benares, took an Ekka* and directed it towards Bangalitola as that was the place which, as he had heard, was the main centre of the Bengalee residents at Benares. The Ekkaman led him up to the entrance of the lane leading to the house of the Yogiraj. Hitalal reached the end of the lane, walking, and was now thinking seriously where to go. That very moment the Yogiraj himself appeared at the entrance of his house and asked Hitalal to come in. The benign appearance of Shri Shyamacharan impressed the guest, and he asked the Yogiraj how he could know him. Shri Shri Thakur, however, asked him not to worry over such matters till he had finished his meals and taken rest. Every arrangement was made for his comfort. In the afternoon Hitalal found many learned gentlemen assembled before Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya in his drawing room. He, however, understood nothing of the high-serious discussions conducted by the Yogiraj on spiritual matters. The next morning Hitalal accompanied Shri Shri Thakur for a bath in the Ganga. After this he was told by the Gracious Yogiraj that it was he who had brought Hitalal here by his spiritual force as the time was ripe for his initiation. Shri Hitalal Sarkar was thus initiated into Kriyayoga by a marvel of Divine Grace showered upon him. How inscrutable were the ways of the Incarnation of Yoga!

* A horse-drawn carriage.

The Leela* of Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya is so endless and infinitely various that it would be impossible for any human being to give a detailed account of it. It is something to be pondered upon and meditated, to be felt along the blood. Many details, however, are still to be had from his devotees and spiritual descendants who are ever living united with the Infinite Consciousness and Grace that is Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya. The blessed touch of such devotees would do more for a seeker than a perusal of his biographies. If, however, a biography of the Yogiraj creates a hankering in the readers' minds after getting into a personal contact with his great spiritual descendants, then and then alone its purpose would be amply fulfilled.

While in his mortal frame, the Yogiraj was the most highly respected citizen of Benares of his times. People would always accept his mediation in case of any religious dispute. Thus, we come to know of an assembly for religious discussions under his chairmanship where he convinced Shrimat Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the 'Arya-Samaj', that his way of worshipping the Impersonal God was certainly not the only way for realising the 'Sachchidananda'. The Divine who is everywhere can also be worshipped in different images according to the various tastes of the devotees. In this connection we come to know of an amusing incident which also gives us a taste of the miraculous Yogic powers of Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya so sparingly used by him. Before starting discussions the Yogiraj had made a condition that only one should speak at a time in that assembly. In the heat of

* The play of Divine Grace.

discussions, however, some of the followers of Shrimat Dayanandaji turned oblivious of that condition and spoke out conjointly to establish their point. The Yogiraj just asked them to stop speaking, and, strangely enough, they found themselves tongue-tied. After some time, the Yogiraj reminded them of the condition and gave them afresh the power of speech. Such tit-bits are scattered throughout the life divine of Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya, and they may be taken as the "escapes of his inner power".

Thus for many many years the Yogiraj was Gracious enough to scatter bliss amidst humanity and paved the way for a spiritual regeneration.

CHAPTER V

Mahasamadhi

In the preceding Chapter we referred to a symbolic message sent by Shri Shri Babaji Maharaj to his great disciple through Shri Yuktेशwar at the Kumbhamela at Prayag. As soon as the message reached the Yogiraj, he suddenly assumed a very grave appearance and became absorbed in Samadhi. It seemed the message contained an indication of Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya's disappearance from this mortal world. This reminds us of a similar symbolic message sent by Shri Shri Adwaitacharya to Shri Chaitanyadeva a few centuries back. Babaji Maharaj had a similar duty to perform. It was he who had brought the Yogiraj into this world for the propagation of the mystery of Yoga. It was he again who commanded his beloved disciple to leave this earth when his mission was entrusted in able hands.

Many of the disciples of Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya were in the know of his intention of leaving this mortal frame in the month of Ashwin, 1302 B. S. The Yogiraj had also told his wife about it six months before his Mahasamadhi and had asked her not to mourn for him ; for, even after leaving this mortal frame, he would be always present shedding his benign Grace everywhere.

The immediate earthly cause of the Yogiraj's departure from this world, however, was a carbuncle on his back. He allowed himself to suffer for a month. When the disease took a serious turn, many of his disciples including his eldest son Sj. Tinkari Lahiri who

was serving in the Postal Accounts Department in Calcutta at that time, and Shrimat Panchanan Bhattacharya were at his bedside at Benares. The famous Dr. Hemchandra Sen, M.D., also a disciple of the Yogiraj, came down from Calcutta for his treatment. As Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya was unwilling to have an operation, the Neem-oil prepared under his instructions was being applied to the wound. Dr. Purnachandra Banerjee, the family physician of Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya, cleansed the wound and put a bandage over it. But as the Yogiraj felt uncomfortable at the bandage, he tore it off and made himself free.

While the Yogiraj was thus suffering, one of his famous physician disciples named Balgovinda who practised Ayurveda earnestly appealed to him for waiting on this earth at least so long as he did not prepare and apply a very rare medicine with high potency. He had already arranged for bringing one of the ingredients for the ointment from Ceylon. Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya yielded to his fervent appeal, it seemed. The ingredient came and the ointment was prepared, but its application could not bring about the desired result.

Of those who nursed Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya during his fatal illness, apart from his family members, the name of his Maharastrian disciple Krishnaramji has been specially mentioned by Sj. Abhoycharan Lahiri. Even when the Yogiraj was in good health, Krishnaramji followed him as his shadow and Shri Shri Thakur, too, had great affection for this simple-minded Brahmin.

At last came the saddest day. It was the Mahastami, the second day of worship for the Divine

Mother, Durga. The Puja was proceeding at the next house, the house of Sj. Rameshwar Chowdhury, the nearest neighbour of the Yogiraj. The most significant part of the Puja is conducted at the moment of transition from the 'Astami' * to the 'Navami'. It was just at this great auspicious juncture or "Sandhiksan" that the Yogiraj opened his eyes for the last time to look at this world in his human body and closed it finally, merging his consciousness in the Ocean of Eternity. The devotees looked on with an agonised feeling never again equalled in their lives.

For a long time the body retained its warmth and did not get stiff. The Yogiraj was taking a serene repose, it seemed. The disciples decorated him with garlands and sandalwood paste. People poured in from far and near to have a last look at the mortal remains of this God-man. The greatest living embodiment of Yoga in modern times was no more in his human frame.

A controversy started as to whether his body would be buried or cremated. Although cremation is the general rule for the common man in the Hindu community in India, the bodies of the great Saints are generally given burials, as sometimes the Yogis perform many miraculous benefits to this world with the help of their bodies. But, although a Master of Yogis, Shri Shri Lahiri Mahashaya was a householder, and therefore, many of his devotees advocated his cremation. His divine body was accordingly carried along with a grand procession to the Manikarnika Ghat and cremated there.

* The eighth day of the dark or bright fortnight. Here it relates to the bright fortnight. So is Navami—the ninth day.