

A Jivanmukta's Asrama-Management.

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Śrī Śrī Bābā Gambhīr Nāthji was universally recognized as the greatest saint of the *Nāth-yogī* sect in recent times. In the society of *Sādhus* he was revered as a *Mahā-puruṣa*, who attained the highest stage of self-realization and lived in the world as *Jīvanmukta*. He had begun his *sādhana* in early youth at the Gorakhnāth Temple of Gorakhpur under the guidance of Bābā Gopālnāthjī, the then Mohant of the temple. For the purpose of absolute self-dedication to *sādhana* and the attainment of higher and higher planes of spiritual experience, he left the temple and established himself in several suitable riverbanks, *Jungles* and hills, one after another in different parts of India. It is the *Kapildhārā* hill near Gayā that he chose at the final stage of his *Sādhana* for the constant uninterrupted practice of dwelling continuously in the highest plane of spiritual consciousness and turning the divine outlook on the self and the world perfectly into his own normal nature. He then became the embodiment of spirituality. His thought, speech and movement were all spiritualized. He attained perfect tranquillity of mind and body. The glory of truth-realization and inner bliss illumined his entire existence. Doubts and difficulties, joys and sorrows, desires and aversions, senses of wants and imperfections could no more have the possibility of approach-

ing his consciousness. He looked upon all the changes of the human, the animal and the physical worlds with equal calmness and gladness as the diverse sporting expressions of the same Absolute Spirit.

It was at this stage that he was brought back to the Gorakhnāth Temple, outwardly by force of circumstances and inwardly by some inscrutable Divine plan. To him now the town of Gorakhpur and the temple of Gorakhnāth had very little difference from the hills of Gayā and the cave of *Kapildhārā*. He was placed at the head of the management of the big temple and its property. He had to look after the regular worship of the shrine, the moral and spiritual welfare as well as the physical necessities and comforts of the *sādhus*, the collection of rents, the prosperity of the tenants, the hospitality to the guests and other works connected with such a big centre of a great religious sect. He had to become a spiritual guide and a cultural instructor, the custodian of the social dignity and moral purity of a big religious community, the head of a large family of *Sādhus* of diverse temperament and character, and also the Zemindar of a pretty big estate. It is easily conceivable how incompatible such a position is likely to be with the disposition of a man who has spent the greater portion of his life in solitary caves, absolutely

detached from all worldly concerns and all along living the life of contemplation and meditation and enjoying the bliss of innermost spiritual experiences. But he arrived at a spiritual plane, in which work and meditation could go on together, in which adaptation and response to changing worldly circumstances could be so managed as not to create any disturbance in the even meditative flow of the inner consciousness, in which the serene joy of solitude might be enjoyed in the midst of thundering roars of warring crowds, in which all the diversities of external experience and all the vicissitudes of outer life appear to the consciousness as impregnated with the beauty and blissfulness of the "one without a second" shining in the inner experience. Bābā Gambhīrnāth submitted with unperturbed equanimity to the circumstances as they appeared and undertook silently all the responsibilities of the position to which he was called. Having returned from his absolutely unworldly life in solitary caves and hills and jungles to the half-worldly life in the Gorakhnāth Temple, he seldom left the place except at the call of duty, and he spent the last quarter of his earthly existence quietly before the public gaze at this headquarter of the *yogī* sect in the big city of Gorakhpur.

Being placed under new circumstances, he at once accommodated his outer manners to their requirements. He adopted the dress and demeanour of a perfect cultured Indian gentleman. The *Kaupīn*, which had constituted

his entire garment, was now concealed under white *dhotī* and *chādar*. The matted hair was disentangled and flew over his shoulders. The body was no longer besmeared with ashes. He began to use a cot and a bedding for sitting and lying on. He occupied a dark windowless compartment on the ground floor of the two-storied building of the *Mohant*. Though the *Mohant* was practically divested by pressure of public opinion of all powers of management and control, his position as the ceremonial head of the *āśram* was in no way interfered with and he was allowed by Bābā Gambhīrnāth to enjoy all the glories and comforts pertaining to and consistent with the dignity of his position. Bābājī began to exercise his power and authority as the manager of the *āśram*. The small compartment which Bābājī occupied was his sleeping room, his drawing room, his office room as well as the room for enjoying the pleasure of trance and imparting instruction to the truth-seekers. All these diverse kinds of activities were to him, so far as could be judged from the manner in which he attended to them, as of the same degree of importance or unimportance. There was no change even in his facial expression in his passing from one form of action to another.

Almost throughout the day he remained seated on his bed in a state of half-trance. It seemed that ninety percent of his consciousness was functioning (if it could be called functioning at all) in some transcendent

supra-mundane spiritual region, to which the people round about him could have no approach, while with the remaining ten percent only he used to carry on the affairs of this world and to deal with all sorts of men. People with different kinds of business would appear before him and present their cases. He would receive them with the gentle ray of smile which always radiated from his face and half-open eyes, and listen to them with such perfect silence and apparent indifference that it was difficult to guess whether the words reached his mind. But just at the appropriate moment he would give answers to their questions or solutions to their problems, whether practical or theoretical, in one or to shortest possible sentences. In most cases he would satisfy the people with such simple words as, 'yes', 'no', 'all right', 'this would do', 'do this', 'do that', etc. Even when the officers of the *Mandir-estate* came to receive instructions with regard to very puzzling complicated issues concerning the property, his mode of dealing with them was in no way altered and no sign of any puzzle or trouble was visible on his forehead or eye-brows. He uttered his 'yes' or 'no' in his usual manner with perfect peace and tranquillity and passed again into the realm of blissful silence. That was found to be enough for the officers and they went away satisfied with regard to the nature of the direction.

This mode of disposing of things should not, however, be confounded with sheer indifference to mundane

affairs, as we ordinarily understand it. The officers, the tenants, the *sādhus*, the guests, the servants,—all felt that though the *Yogirāj* was sitting on his bed almost always with half-closed and inwardly directed eyes, nothing really escaped his notice, and he was not altogether indifferent to what ought to be and what ought not to be. His insight into the worldly affairs also was so deep that even the experienced officers dared not take any important step without informing him and taking his permission. Sometimes while sitting composedly in his usual posture he would suddenly open his eyes and send for an officer and would again pass into the depth of silence. When the officer would come, he would again arise, as it were, from deep sleep, mildly put one or two questions to him and on hearing his answers would give him some warning or direction by signs or words and go down into himself again. Perhaps some action or inaction on the part of the officer was improper and undesirable; he was made conscious that his conduct did not escape his notice and he was softly chastized and asked to mend his ways. The officer became ashamed and resolved to improve his conduct. If any officer made any kind of oppression upon the tenants or realized rents from them without tender consideration for their pecuniary circumstances, the *yogirāj* would at once become awake and in his usual calm and sweet manner would remind the officer that anybody who was indifferent to the health and comforts of the children

( meaning the tenants ) of Gorakhnāth was not worthy to be a servant of Gorakhnāth.

The tenants of Gorakhnāth's Zamindary felt in their heart of hearts that *Booḍā-mahārāj* ( as Bābājī was generally addressed by them ) was more than their father and mother, inasmuch as he was not only full of sweet affection for them, but had also infinite power to cure their ills. Even while living at a physical distance from him, they had the conviction that his merciful eyes were always on them. Nobody could take any unfair advantage of his unworldly character in the administration of the *āśrama* and estate, and nobody would feel discontented that he was not receiving what attention he deserved from the *āśrama* authority. But while everything was going on smoothly in every department of the *āśrama* and a pure spiritual atmosphere could be breathed in all its parts whenever anyone turned his eyes towards the person who was the life and soul of the *āśrama*, he would find with astonishment that the attention of that central personality was far far away from this world and was perhaps wholly concentrated upon some changeless blissful self-luminous Reality.

The self-enjoying *Yogirāj* took particular delight in the feeding of the poor and the holy and the cultured, and he appeared to regard this as one of the main functions of the *āśrama*. He ordered the celebration of *Utsav* on particular festive occasions in different seasons of the year, and on all such occasions

the feeding of the *sādhūs*, the pundits, and the poor half-starved men, women and children constituted an essential part of the *Pūjā* of the deity. He taught that the *sādhūs* represented the ideal of renunciation for the sake of the spiritual perfection of human life, and the *Brāhmaṇa Pundits* represented the ideal of self-dedication to moral, religious and intellectual culture at the sacrifice of worldly comforts in the Hindu society. Individual *sādhūs* and *Brāhmaṇas* might fall far short of the ideals and might even be guilty of positive sins deserving severe punishment at the hands of the Deity and the society. But *sādhūs* and *Brāhmaṇas* as classes should not be condemned or looked down upon for that reason, even though the number of such erring individuals be found to be very large at any period of the history of the society. The institutions of *sādhūs* and *Brāhmaṇas* have evolved in the social life of the Indian Humanity in course of its development from time immemorial, and the ideals they represent are worthy of being kept before the mind's eye by all men of all ages and countries. The continued existence of these institutions inspite of the impurities that might have entered into them, is a perpetual source of spiritual and cultural inspiration to millions and millions of unsophisticated people of this vast continent. To respect, serve and look to the comforts of the *sādhūs* and the *Brāhmaṇas* in general as representatives of the spiritual and cultural ideals of the human society amounts to offering worship to these ideals

and receiving inspiration from them. The *Yogirāj* taught that by constantly associating in thought and feeling the *sādhūs* and the *Brāhmaṇas* with the ideals they represented such a habit should be formed that the very sight of any *sādhū* or a *Brāhmaṇa* might inspire the mind with the noble ideal of embracing poverty for the sake of spiritual and cultural attainments. For the purpose of giving this lesson to all around him as well as awakening the dormant self-respect and self-confidence in the *sādhūs* and *Brāhmaṇas* themselves, Yogirāj Gambhīrnāth used to show in his characteristic way tender regards even to the unworthy *sādhūs* and *Brāhmaṇas*, and never treated them in such a way that they might feel humiliated or form low estimates of themselves. By his behaviour they were constantly reminded of the ideals for which they stood and to which they owed all the honours and privileges they enjoyed, and other people also were inspired by the same noble ideals.

With regard to the proper use of the temple-property, Bābā Gambhīrnāth's teaching and conduct pointed out that the property of the Deity was really the property of the poor, that the Deity enjoyed the property dedicated to Him through its actual enjoyment by the poor, that the worship of the Deity, in order to be fruitful, must be embodied in the service of the poor. The religious endowments in this country were the most nobly conceived and efficiently organized institutions for the maintenance of those who either embraced poverty and refrained from directing their time and energy

to the earning of livelihood for the sake of the high spiritual and cultural ideals of human life, or were placed in distressful circumstances through misfortune or on account of their inability to stand in the struggle for existence. Both these classes of people were dependent for their food and clothing and shelter upon the generosity of the society, and it was the duty of those who had resources at their command to look upon them in the same way as the earning members of the families looked upon the minor children and the old infirm members of those families. The religious endowments were made by the society through their more fortunate members for the service of these poor sections of the community. They were dedicated to the Deity who was the real protector of all and was the true self of the rich and the poor alike, and they were entrusted for their management and proper use to saintly persons who had renounced the world, had no self-interest and devoted their life to the service of the Deity and the poor. It was as an important part of the worship of the Deity that the *sebaīl* or the *Mohant* was in duty bound to place himself in the service of the poor. Yogirāj Gambhīrnāth taught this duty of the persons in charge of the management of shrines and religious endowments by his own example as well as instruction.

The Gorakhnāth Temple, being reputed to be one of the principal sites of Gorakhnāth's *Tapasyā* and being one of the biggest centres of the *Yogī* sect, is regarded as a

particularly holy place of pilgrimage to the Hindus in general and Gorakhnāth's followers in particular. The sacredness of a holy place is believed to become much more dynamic and inspiring by the presence of a perfectly self-realized *Mahāpuruṣa*. Accordingly it can be easily understood that, at the time of Bābā Gambhīrnāth's stay at the Gorakhnāth Temple, numerous pilgrims from far and near came to the Temple. Among them were *sādhus* and householders, men, women and children, persons of high social position and people having no position in the society. Many of them came with the sole purpose of being blessed with Bābājī's *darśan*. Bābā Gambhīrnāth as the principal *sevak* of the temple was found to be careful about the comforts of them all. Though he talked so little and almost always in a semi-trance state, his reputation for hospitality and charity spread far and wide. His arrangements for looking after the comforts of all in-comers, whatever might be their position, were perfect. Whenever any guest felt any kind of inconvenience, the *Yogirāj's* attention was attracted towards it, his half-closed eyes as well as his lips gently opened, he whispered to some *sevak* or officer to go to them and remove the cause of their inconvenience; sometimes he himself sent them the articles they needed without being asked for them. The guests were struck with wonder to discover that the eyes of the trance-enjoying *Yogī* were at the same time all-pervading and solicitous about the comforts of all. He used to say even to his

disciples that he, being a servant of Gorakhnāth, was a servant to them all, and that they being the guests of Gorakhnāth were the objects of his respectful service. He actually looked after their comforts, of course in his characteristic way, just as a pious householder of exceptionally reserved nature would arrange for and look after the comforts of respectable invited guests. Even his giving of *darśan* and receiving of *praṇām* appeared from his manners to be of the nature of service rendered from a sense of duty to them.

Not only did the men who came near to him feel his love and affectionate attention towards them, but the subhuman animals also were charmed by his love and mercy. The service to the cows was of course an essential part of the mandir-work. The *Yogirāj* sometimes himself walked to the *Go-śālā* to supervise the arrangement for the comforts of the cows and bulls and to caress them. He had a tiger which forgot its ferocious nature in his company. He had an elephant for his *Vāhan* (carrier). Both the tiger and the elephant died suddenly soon after he gave up the body. He used to keep milk at the place where any serpent was known to dwell; he used to feed the rats and the ants with particles of bread with his own hands; the dogs, the cats, the monkeys received their shares of his loving service.

It should be remembered that all these were mere spontaneous outward expressions of his boundless and

fathomless universal love, and these practical demonstrations instead of being the measures of his love were mere lessons for others. In his apparent social life he was the perfect embodiment of love, non-violence, calmness and sweetness.

Every year the *Yogirāj* spent a few months in the villages within the Zamindary of Gorakhnāth, evidently to see with his own eyes and to demonstrate his practical sympathy with the joys and sorrows of the poor children of Gorakhnāth, to afford them opportunities to approach him and have the pleasure of informing him directly of the circumstances under which they lived and receiving blessings from him. A kind and

sympathetic look and a word of consolation were enough to lighten their hearts and to give them a message of hope and peace. Acts of charity, private as well as public, for the removal of their physical wants were of course performed by him wherever he went. The consciousness that they were the tenants of God and were under the care of a *Mahāpuruṣa* who was inwardly identified with God was awakened in them, and this was of the greatest moral and spiritual value to their life. The attention which this *Mahāpuruṣa* paid to the villages and the poor villagers was an object-lesson to all owners and managers of landed property.

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