

Paramahansa Srimat Swami Nigamananda Saraswati Dev

Paramahansa Srimat Swami Nigamananda Saraswati Dev (1879-1935), reverently called by his devotees as Shree Shree Thakura was one of the influential spiritual leaders of India. He is the founder of Assam Bangiya Saraswat Matha in Jorhat, Assam , India and Nilachala Saraswat Sangha in Puri, Orissa , India.

Biography

Early life

Paramahansa Shree Shree Nigamananda Saraswati Deva was born to a virtuous brahmin couple at Qutabpur in Nadia district (now in Bangladesh) in the year 1879. His father Bhuban Mohan Bhattacharya and mother Yogendra Mohini had named him 'Nalinikanta'. As he grew to boyhood, Nalinikanta drew admiration of the people for his extraordinary fearlessness, intelligence and forthrightness. Leadership was natural to him. Nalinikanta was especially dear to his mother.

As the fate would have it the mother of Nalinikanta breathed her last immaturely from a brief illness. At that time, Nalinikanta was pursuing his primary education in his maternal uncle's village Radhakantapur. Her death deeply shocked Nalinikanta as he was very much devoted to his mother. He came to know that just before she breathed her last, his mother had handed over his charges to the 'Jaganmata'; the 'Cosmic Mother'. He took the words of her mother to be literally true. As he was desperately in need of a mother, he single-heartedly prayed to the 'Jaganmata' to appear before him.

But alas! He failed to get a glimpse of 'Her'; even in his dreams. He lost faith in God thinking that God does not exist, the religious rites and spiritual practices are worthless activities, and all those sadhus, ascetics or renouncer's are lazy worthless cheats. His belief in God was shaken to such extent that he turned extremely antagonistic towards everything related to Him.

Especially, the sadhus and the wandering ascetics used to face most of his ire. He convinced himself that 'death' is the 'end' of everything in one's life. Thereafter he decided for himself that - religion to him would be nothing other than 'doing good to the fellow beings', and his duty is to lead a disciplined and virtuous life.

During his school days Nalinikanta used to read textbooks that the 'Sun' is a gigantic ball of burning gases and the 'Moon' and the other planets are composed of gross matters such as dust and rocks. He used to feel a pinch in his heart when his fellow countrymen were jeered at as superstitious folks paying obeisance to these insentient planets. Even though he had lost faith in God and religion, he used to wonder how all those ancient Rishis (seers) of his land could go wrong in putting such significance on these heavenly bodies. Later, during his sadhak (spiritual practitioner) life, he was delighted to find that thousand of years before Newton, the ancient Rishis of India knew the science of space and the principles of gravitation. His heart was urging him to spread the knowledge and ideals of those ancient Rishis among his fellow beings.

The Turning Point

The death of his beloved mother Yogendramohini Devi created a void in the Bhattacharya household. Nalinikanta being the eldest son in the family had to be married soon to bring a daughter-in-law for the proper management of the household. Hence, at the early age of seventeen, Nalinikanta was married to an extremely beautiful and intelligent girl named Sudhansubala Devi(She was from Halisahar, a city near kolkata).

Nalinikanta went to study at the Dhaka School of Survey and thereafter took up jobs at various places to earn his livelihood. His independent spirit and forthright attitude was forcing him to frequently change his jobs.

Once, while serving as the supervisor of the Narayanapur estate (Zamindari) Nalinikanta was working late in the night. He suddenly saw the shadowy image of Sudhansubala Devi standing at the table, sullen and silent. Sudhansubala Devi was supposed to be away at Qutabpur at that time and was not expected to be present at Narayanpur at all. The image appeared there for a few moments only. Nalinikanta felt disturbed and rushed to his village Qutabpur. He came to know that Sudhansubala Devi had expired just an hour before he saw her image at Narayanapur. Since childhood Nalinikanta had a thoughtful disposition. This incidence drew him further inwards. Soon after, he happened to see the shadowy image of Sudhansubala Devi several times in quick succession.

Nalinikanta had thought that death is the ultimate end of an individual. But, now he couldn't wish away the fact that it is not. By now, he was convinced that there must be 'life' after 'death'. He solemnly resolved to get back his beloved wife at any cost. Never before in the history of mankind any bereaved husband had made such a resolution, being so much oblivious of the impossibility of his success.

The Quest For Truth

Nalinikanta became desperate to know all about the subtle phenomena of life and death. Thoughts such as - "What's death? How can I win over death? If death can come inevitably at any time in one's life why am I wasting my time without exploring the secrets of it?" - began to worry him all the time. This inquest took him to the Theosophical Society at Adyar, in Chennai, India. He learnt all the theories and practices that Theosophy could offer and was able to talk to Sudhansu Devi through a medium. But, Nalinikanta could not see her physically. He was not satisfied with the experience at all. Through a discussion with the members of the Society he came to know that the knowledge about the phenomena of 'life and death' was the prerogative of the Hindu Yogis. He spared no time in looking for a true Yogi or Sadhu who could fulfill his desire to meet his dead wife as well as bring contentment to his seeking mind.

While searching for a true yogi, Nalinikanta came across Swami Purnananda, a highly educated renunciate. The Swami explained to him that all female beings are merely a partial manifestation of the 'Mahamaya' or the 'Cosmic Mother'. Hence, it was extremely unwise and ridiculous on his part to run after an insignificant part

(his wife) ignoring the whole (the Cosmic Mother). If he could get Mahamaya, he would automatically get his wife and there were sure ways to get Her. Swami Purnananda advised him to look for a Sadguru. Nalinikanta returned to his place of service a changed man. The belief in 'life after death' and 'soul' had turned him into a believer. He was desperately praying God for a chance to meet his destined Sadguru.

One night Nalinikanta saw one Sadhu with a brilliant aura around him in his dream. He woke up to find the Sadhu standing beside his bed in 'reality'. The Sadhu handed out to him a leaf bearing a mantra on it and then disappeared. Nalinikanta was spellbound by the incident. He did not know what to do with the mantra. No sadhu or spiritual teacher, whom he consulted, could decipher the mantra nor could they give him any guidance about what to do with it. At this point of time a crestfallen Nalinikanta received directions in his dream to go to the greatest tantrik guru of that time - Bamakshepa, at the 'Tarapitha' of Birbhum, in West Bengal. Bama was extremely pleased to see the unique 'veeja mantra' (root/source mantra) of Goddess Tara which Nalinikanta had received in his dream, and readily accepted him as his disciple. Within a short span of one month, Nalinikanta was able to master the secrets of the Tantrik ways (tantra sadhana) of attaining spiritual success. As a mark of perfection of his sadhana (spiritual practice), 'Tara' or 'Mahashakti' (the embodiment of cosmic energy) appeared before him in the form of Devi Sudhansubala and granted him the boon that he would be able to see her in that form whenever he would so wish.

But, Nalinikanta became discontent when he was unable to touch that form. Moreover, to his amazement Nalinikanta saw that a brilliant light used to emanate from his body and take the shape of Devi Sudhansubala. He was puzzled. He wanted to know "if 'Mahashakti' originated from him only, then who 'he' is."

Overpowered by a consuming desire to know his 'self', Nalinikanta sought guru Bamakshepa's advice. The latter advised him to attain the knowledge of 'Advaita' from a Vedantic guru. He became a disciple of guru Srimad Swami Satchidananda Saraswati at the holy place of 'Pushkar' in the state of Rajasthan, India. He instantly realized that Swami Satchidananda Saraswati was the sadhu who gave him the 'Tara' mantra in his dream. The swami initiated Nalinikanta into renunciation and according to the principle changed his name to 'Nigamananda', for he was able to comprehend the Vedic (nigama) knowledge (jnana) effortlessly. Per advice of Swami Satchidananda he went out for quest of a Yogi Guru to practically understand and visualise directly the Vedic (nigama) knowledge (jnana).

Later under unbelievable circumstance (-For details please refer the Life History book), he met his Yogi Guru - whom he used to refer as Sumeru Das Ji (other wise know as Koot Hoomi Lal Singh or Kuthumi nineteenth-century Kashmiri Brahman, Shigatse, Tibet; also called K.H. In 1875 he founded with El Morya the Theosophical Society). Under Sumeru das Ji's tutelage he learnt the secrets of Yoga. After sincere practice he attained the Savikalpa and then The Nirvikalpa Samadhi - the highest point of Yoga. In yoga he visualised and practically comprehend the Vedic knowledge he learnt from Guru Satchidananda in his own body. He attained his Nirvikalpa samadhi on Kamakshya Hill (in Assam, India). From Nirvikalpa Samadhi he again descended as a Sadguru to enlighten mankind.

Life After Attainment Of Truth

During the 1907 Kumbh Mela at Allahabad, India under the auspices of the then Shankaracharya of Sringeri Mutt, the jnaniguru of Nalinikanta Swami Satchidananda Deva conferred the title of paramahansa on him in the presence of leading sadhus and renunciates. The uniqueness about Nigamananda's spiritual accomplishment was that he had explored and perfected tantra, jnana, yoga and prema/bhav, all the four original ways envisaged in Sanatana Dharma (ever new/eternal, and universal spiritual method based on Vedic knowledge) for the attainment of the highest spiritual goal.

Assam Bangiya Saraswat Math

'Assam Bangiya Saraswat Math' (previously known as Shanti Ashram) is a monastic organization founded by Srimat Swami Nigamananda Saraswati Paramahansadev in 1912 AD. Now it has near about 50 branches (Saraswat Ashrams) in all over India and abroad. The main aim behind the foundation of ABS Math is to spread and propagate Sanatan Dharma and true knowledge about God, besides preparing the inmates for achieving spiritual attainments for undertaking the Guru's job.

History of Saraswata Math:

(Please refer to Sree Sree Thakura Nigamananda Jibani Book in Oriya)

.....In the end of happy journey of austere endeavor of Srimat Swami Nigamananda Saraswati, the 'Shanti Ashram' was founded by him in the auspicious occasion of Akshay Tiritiya at Kumilla Durgapur in 1314 B.S. for the first time. He returned to Dhaka after staying there almost three and half years due to some reasons. The Shanti Ashram was shifted to Gendaria in Dhaka in 1318 B.S. 'Sri Gouranga Anath Niketan' was founded there on 26th Agraphayan 1318 B.S. The noble purpose behind it is to serve the distressed, the grieved, the sick and the poor.

There was a disciple named Saruram Kalita, inhabitant of Charigram near Jorhat, would go to Sri Sri Thakur. He supplied the information to Sri Sri Thakur that vast land was given by Govt. in Assam only charging with an irregular fees.

Saruram purchased a plot of 80 bighas at Kumarveti Chapri village of Kokilamukh taking money from Sri Sri Thakur. The Math was instituted on the land.

Sri Sri Thakur together with Swami Swarupananda and Atul Chakraborty went to Kokilamukh on 10th Magh, 1318 B.S. from Dhaka and selected the place after observing it. And he stayed there with Atul Chakraborty. Coming back to Dhaka Swami Swarupanandaji made an arrangement for sending the all ashram articles to Kokilamukh by steamer. On 22nd Falgun all of them came to Kokilamukh winding up the Dhaka Ashram this year. Sri Sri Thakur himself founded the asan of Gurubrhama at Kokilamukh in the propitious occasion of Akshay Tiritiya on 7th Baisakh 1319 B.S. and gave the name to it also Shanti Ashram.

First seven self denying disciples (Swami Chidananda, Swami Premananda, Swami Swarupananda, Swami Yogananda,

Swami Suddhananda, Swami Bodhananda and Swami Saradananda) were initiated asceticism by Sri Sri Thakur and he gave name to this Ashram as Saraswata Matha. Then it has been given a name to Assam Bangiya Saraswat Math since 1325 B.S.

Being an ascetic relating to the title of Saraswati under the Sringeri Math he gives the name to his Matha as 'Saraswat Math', Ashram as 'Saraswat Ashram' and Sangha as 'Saraswat Sangha'. The religious books compiled by him is familiarized as 'Saraswat Granthabali'.....

Nilachala Saraswata Sangha

(Please refer to the Nilachala Bani book in Oriya for Details)

'Nilachala Saraswata Sangha(NSS), Puri' was founded by Swami Nigamananda Paramhans Dev exclusively for his Oriya-speaking household devotees on 24 August 1934, the full moon day of the Indian month of Shraavana at Nilachal Kutir, his eternal abode at Puri on the Eastern sea-coast. That day was incidentally his birthday. The Oriya devotees gathered there to celebrate his birthday and pay him their regards. Swami Nigamananda felt a divine urge from within to form this Sangha as expressed by him before the devotees there. The main purpose was to unite his handful of Oriya devotees then for his worship jointly at a common place and to foster a common bond among them as his disciples and devotees. After forming the Sangha and naming it as Nilachal Saraswat Sangha, Swami Nigamananda categorically told the members to lead an ideal household life on the lines of his teachings, keep his image or photographs in the house and worship it as Guru as per their oriya traditions and share their spiritual experiences among themselves without any reservation. The devotees were also advised to have a weekly congregation specially on Sundays at a suitable place for joint worship of the Guru, discuss his ideas and read his books.

NSS was started with very few members. Most of them were then the school students. After their studies, they were scattered but were meeting without fail at Nilachal Kutir, Puri on the occasion of the birth day celebration of their Guru. Swami Nigamananda told them that his devotees were there in this part of the country and they would gradually join this Sangha. The words of the Sadguru were unailing. This happened after the Oriya biography of Swami Nigamananda was published in the year 1942 AD. After reading this book, many people were attracted towards this Sadguru and became his devotee owing allegiance to NSS which he founded for Oriya devotees primarily.

The first Secretary of the Sangha was Shri Banamali Dash, an eminent lawyer, social worker and a dignitary of Puri, a disciple of Swami Nigamananda who subsequently became its President and Shri Durga Charan Mohanty as Secretary. Subsequently, Sri Durga Charan Mohanty became its Secretary and Palichalaka or administer. As of 2010, Sri Syam Sunder Dash is the president of Nilachala Saraswata Sangha and Sri Sangram Kesari Sinha is the vice-president and the Parichalaka or the administer.

NSS is now a registered body under the Indian Societies Registration Act. It has a registered Byelaw which contains details of its organizational structure and positions created for its effective management. Its registered headquarters is at Swargadwara, Puri, Orissa, India NSS has a Governing Body consisting of nine members. This body is aided in its decision-making process and administration of NSS by an 'Advisory Board' comprising representatives from all its branches called 'Sakha Sangha'. The role and functions of these two bodies have been clearly defined in the Byelaw of NSS. President of the Governing Body is the head of NSS.

At present, NSS has more than 120 branches (Sakha Sangha) in different parts of the Orissa State for the convenience of the collective worship of Shri Guru Maharaja by the devotees at a nearby place. Some branches have 'Pathachakras' which are units of small groups of devotees for joint worship and study of books published by NSS. Outside Orissa, NSS has a number of branches such as New Delhi, Kolkata, Jamshedpur, Bangalore, Hyderabad etc, to mention a few. It has also crossed the boundary of India with its branch in United States of America. Each branch has a Managerial Body to look after its day-to-day management. The NSS has now about 4000 approved family worship centers at the houses of member-devotees which are called 'Gruhasanas' with an image of Guru installed in it for providing opportunity for daily worship of Shri Guru at the family level where Shri Shri Guru Maharaj is considered not only as a member of the family but its head. Such Gruhasanas are places for spiritual practices of individual members of NSS also.

The NSS which had a humble beginning with a handful of devotees in the year 1934 A.D. has grown in size, strength and structure over the years due to the grace of Shri Shri Guru Maharaj and has now more than 10,000 devotees and is an important religious organization in the State of Orissa and India.

The NSS issues annual identity cards to its members containing the text of daily prayers before the Guru and some do's and don'ts. The NSS believes in the eternal existence of Shri Shri Guru Maharaj, Swami Nigamananda Saraswati Dev. Each member of NSS accepts Swami Nigamananda as their only Guru and Ista and gives affirmation to NSS that is or she will be fully guided by the directions of the NSS. As per the Byelaw of NSS, only household devotees of Swami Nigamananda will be its members.

Being a religious organization, NSS undertakes a number of religious activities throughout the year both at the Central and branch levels. The birthday of Shri Shri Guru Maharaj is celebrated with great enthusiasm by the devotees at Nilachal Kutir, Puri. It organizes many educative programs at Biratunga, Puri every year for the executive members of branches who look after management of these bodies. NSS has since published Oriya translations of all the books written by Swami Nigamananda. Many books of Swami Nigamananda was translated in oriya by Late Shri Durga Charan Mohanty. It has also several other publications to its credit for the benefit of the devotees. It also brings out a quarterly religious journal in Oriya, 'The Sangha Sevak' containing discussions on the life and teachings of Swami Nigamananda and writings on various other religious matters. Each branch of NSS holds weekly congregations of devotees for collective worship of the Guru, discussions on the life and teachings of the Guru, reading of books, sharing spiritual experiences and exchange of emotions. Branches also organize several functions on various festive days.

NSS organizes an annual conference of its devotees at various places in Orissa at the time of the full moon day of the

month of Magha which provides a forum for meeting of all the devotees both male and female belonging to NSS to worship the Guru Maharaj collectively, exchange ideas and share spiritual experiences among them. This annual conference is called the Utkal Pradeshik Bhakta Sammilani where discussions are held on living an ideal household life and Sangha Saktir Pratistha (matters relating to NSS and organization of groups of devotees for collective worship) with Bhaba Binimay (interchange of emotions). Devotees derive great pleasure in attending it and meeting other devotees from various places once in a year. This conference also helps in the propagation of the teachings and ideas of Shri Shri Guru Maharaj among the local people where it is held.

The NSS guide their member devotees on the path of their spiritual progress and in attainment of Chitta Sudhi and helps in the fulfillment of the mission of Swami Nigamananda in Orissa in propagating the Eternal Religion, spreading Satsikshya and Siva Jnane Jiva Seva (serving the humanity) in various ways. Its member-strength is increasing from year to year and will continue to do so.

His Philosophy

Sadguru Swami Sri Sri Nigamananda Saraswati Deva wished every soul to rise to this exulted state of consciousness. Hence, he entered into society to wake up a spiritually inert people.

In the prevailing atmosphere of confusion in ideals and spirituality among his countrymen, he wanted them to rediscover the merits of sanatana dharma. He wrote five books - Bramhacharya Sadhana, Yogiguru, Tantrikguru, Jnaniguru and Premikaguru - which are invaluable for any seeker on the path of spirituality. He edited and published a path breaking and reformist periodical Arya Darpana (one of the earliest periodicals of India). It was widely received as a trend-setting journal on religion and spirituality.

With a view to establishing universal brotherhood he set before himself three objectives, namely, (i) propagation of sanatana dharma, (ii) dissemination of sat siksha (right type of education that enables development of integrated personality conducive for spiritual development), and (iii) service to all living beings deeming it as service rendered to the Supreme Being. In his opinion a person having attained 'self knowledge' is the right one to serve mankind in the right manner.

He enjoined upon His devotees — to walk together on the path of spirituality forming Sanghas (spiritual associations), to lead Adarsha Grihastha Jeevan (life of an ideal householder), and to have Bhava Binimaya (commune with each other for mutual exchange of spiritual ideas and experiences), which would enable them to achieve the above mentioned objectives and lead a fulfilled life.

He established the tradition of Bhakta Sammilani (the annual congregation of devotees and spiritually minded people, for the close interaction between the two types of seekers — the household devotees and the renunciates. Till date, this congregation has been proved to be a spiritually beneficial experience for all.

There was a harmonious blending of highest enlightenment (jnana) and universal love (vakti) in the person of Swamy Nigamananda. Rightly so, his ideological as well as methodological slogan was — " Shankarer Mata" (the Vedantic doctrine of the 8th century spiritual reformist Sri Sri Adi Shankaracharya that Bramha — the Supreme Soul and the individual soul is 'one' and the same, and it is the ultimate truth to be realized by men), and "Gauranger Patha" (the path of devotion adopted by Sri Chaitanya Deva, the fourteenth century avatara of devotion, as the royal road to the spiritual destination i.e. God).

Books on and by Swami Nigamananda

- * Yogi Guru by Swami Nigamananda in Bengali , Oriya, Hindi and English
- * Gyani Guru by Swami Nigamananda in Bengali , Oriya, Hindi and English
- * Tantrika Guru by Swami Nigamananda in Bengali , Oriya, Hindi and English
- * Premika Guru by Swami Nigamananda in Bengali , Oriya, Hindi and English
- * Bramhacarrya Sadhana by Swami Nigamananda in Bengali , Oriya, Hindi and English
- * Vedanta Viveka by Swami Nigamananda in Bengali , Oriya
- * Nigama Sutra by Swami Nigamananda in Bengali , Oriya