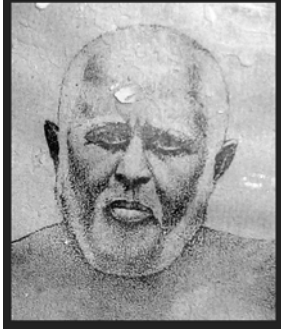


Divine Helmsman

Among the first to inflame my flickering curiosity in lives of great spiritual personalities was the Bengali book series ‘Bharater Sadhak’ (Saints of India) authored by Shri Shankarnath Roy.



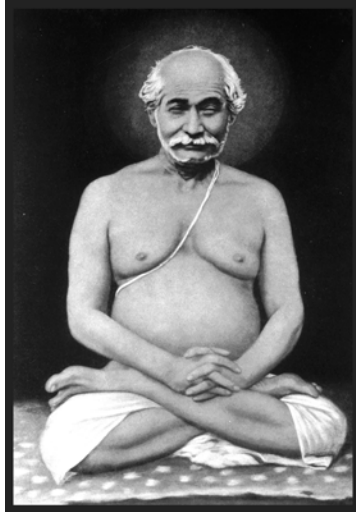
Being a student at that time, I did not have too much money to spare. Yet after completing each volume containing around a score of spiritual life-tales, I rushed to buy the next, as if addicted, and completed close to a dozen volumes. The very first biography of the first volume was that of Mahatma Trailanga Swami and it was my earliest introduction to him. This incomparable yogi strode like a colossus in the spiritual arena for anything between three to four hundred years, the last century and a half of which was in open public gaze in the holy city of Varanasi. Innumerable historically documented tales of his legendary yogic powers known from encounters with all kinds of people - plebeians, royals, administrators, skeptics, humbugs, devotees, aspirants and saints - are folklore. It struck me that each such display of yogic perfection contained deep wisdom expressed with infinite compassion and child-like playfulness. I take this opportunity to mention one such incident that continues to excite me whenever I recall it.

An Indian Raja reverentially invited the Swami to his boat on the River Ganga. Aboard the vessel, Swami-ji expressed interest for the bejeweled sword that was in the Maharaja's possession. Apparently it was

a reward given to him by the Viceroy for the King's bravery and was a prized item for the owner. He proudly handed it to the Mahatma to examine. Holding it with great curiosity, Trailanga Swami suddenly tossed it overboard into the river. The King was at his wit's end. He begged the saint to retrieve his treasure, 'Please give me back my sword, Sir', he pleaded. The Swami smiled innocently and prepared to leave. Frustration began giving way to anger as the outraged King continued to ask for return of his 'my sword'. Swami-ji then leaned over, dipped his hand in the water and took out two identical swords asking the King to identify which one was 'his sword'. The King, unable to make out any difference, was stunned into bewildered silence. Trailanga Swami then threw one of the two pieces back into the water and handed over the other to the stupefied Maharaja saying 'Why do you talk about something as being yours if you cannot even recognize it?' It is therefore no wonder that he was revered as the 'Sachal Vishwanath' or 'Walking Shiva' - the Lord of the Universe himself who, having perfected that body was using it as a vehicle for divine manifestation.

In the book 'Autobiography of a Yogi', Paramhansa Yogananda, while giving a reference to Trailanga Swami remarked, 'He was one of the siddhas (perfected beings) who have cemented India against the erosions of time.' This line somehow intrigued me as being loaded with inner meanings that Yogananda-ji did not possibly fully elaborate in public. Often many secrets learnt through inner realizations or through the Guru Parampara are not stated in public. A quick research on Trailanga Swami revealed his connections to a large number

of saints and spiritual lineages. Yogananda-ji has mentioned his close relationship with Sri Sri Shyamacharan Lahiri Mahashay. I also



Sri Shyamacharan Lahiri Mahashay

read how the then Brahma preacher, Sri Sri Bijoy Krishna Goswami, tried to run away from the great Swami who kept on insisting that he had been instructed by God to give him a mantra and prepare him for his primary mission just before Sri Bijoy Krishna met his own Sadguru. This became a turning point in the life of Gosai-ji, who later transformed into a self-realized saint. Sri Lokenath Brahmachari, a great yogi himself, refers to Trailanga Swami (whom he met in the Himalayas before he came to Varanasi) as one of the greatest personalities he had encountered and acknowledged the spiritual help that he received from the Swami, then known in the mountains as Hitalal Mishra.

Swami-ji's famous interaction with Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa was witnessed by the woman saint and illustrious disciple of Trailanga Swami, Shankari Mai Jew. The story goes on like this: During the interaction, Sri Ramakrishna first lifted his fore-finger and then two fingers, apparently

asking whether God was singular (advaita) or dual (dwaita)? Swami-ji, in response, lifted one finger and then joined the two fingers. This has been explained as – when the self is fully immersed in the transcendental soul during Samadhi then in that state of absolute unity (advaita) God is realized as one; again when one approaches God as a devotee then the duality (dwaita bhava) of bhakta-bhagwan comes into play; this duality is also a conjoined unity like the joined halves of chick-peas or gram. After this sign-based interaction both saints went into deep Samadhi. Coming out from this state Sri Ramakrishna encircled Trailanga Swami in a rapturous sankirtana-like dance with his hands raised. Later Sri Ramakrishna arranged for bhog of payasa of several kilograms for the 'God in motion', all of which the Swami consumed in his inimitable style of eating only when fed. The Swami offered Sri Ramakrishna his little gold snuff box as a gift in return. Shankari Mata, who was also the daughter of Sri Kalikananda Abadhut, (one of the principal and highly advanced disciples of Trailanga Swami) lived for more than a hundred years and recounted to Swami Yogananda her times spent with Sri Lahiri Mahashay including occasions when Mahavatar Babaji Maharaj appeared before both of them. (I remember Sree Sree Maa insisting on visiting the sadhana room of the late Shankari Mata during one of our early trips to Varanasi and the wonderful vibrations we felt there.)



Shankari Mai Jew

Though we hear of only a few formal disciples of Trailanga Swami, a little research revealed an illustrious lineage that spans several spiritual arenas covering Vedanta and Tantra. Other than Sri Kalikananda Abadhut and his divinely pre-destined daughter Shankari Mata and their distinguished lineages, one of the foremost disciples of Trailanga Swami was his nephew Swami

Paramananda Saraswati, who also lived for almost three hundred years. Sree Sree Maa had mentioned to me that Swami Paramananda later stayed in the Manasarovar region and guided more than a hundred advanced sadhaks into Paramhansa-hood before finally returning to the plains prior to leaving his mortal coil. Sree Sree Maa was once invited to the Kolkata Ashram and Temple of the Mahananda Mission by the then head, Swami Bimalananda Giri Maharaj. I had the good fortune of being in the party that visited the temple-ashram. They uphold a Shakti-sadhana lineage of Trailanga Swami that branched though his reclusive yet very advanced yogi disciple Swami Suryananda Giri, not even a photo or picture of whom I could locate. This was followed up by high order saints like Swami Mahananda Giri (in whose name the mission runs) and Swami Bhabananda Giri prior to Swami Bimalananda. During an interaction with Sri Saumyendranath Brahmachari, Acharya of Dev Sangha, whose lineage includes the divine rishi parampara of Sri Bijoy Krishna Chattopadhyay, Brahmarshi Satyadev, Sri Pulin Bihari Brahmachari and Sri Narendranath Brahmachari Maharaj, I was thrilled to hear that they draw their glittering lineage of self-realized saints from Mahatma Trailanga too. Sri Saumyen Baba informed me that Sri Bijoy Krishna Chattopadhyay had said that he had received the divine initiation from Trailanga Swami. Saumyen Baba also related some very interesting stories he had heard of how the great Mahatma Trailanga would start speaking from absolute silence - all of a sudden, immediately attaining full volume without need for any warming up - and after completing, again instantly become deafeningly silent and still. It was as if a

stone statue suddenly spoke up and became a statue again! I also remember that Sri Pranabananda Giri Maharaj (disciple of Shyamacharan Lahiri Baba) mentioning a sadhana experience of his as follows: I was in deep meditation when a pranava-like sun appeared in the inner sky and, from within the pranava jyoti, Mahatma Trailanga Swami's smiling head popped out. He blessed me and went back within, into the omkar-sun, again.

Yet, I knew that if I approached Sree Sree Maa, I would get more spiritual insights. She first showed me Sant Dariya Sahib's description of his realization of 'Alakh Niranjan' - the Absolute Infinite Supreme Existence-Consciousness -

*"Sadho, Alakh Niranjan Soyi,
Guru Partap Ramras nirmal,
aur na duja koi;
Sakal gyan-par gyan-dayanidhi,
sakal jyoti par jyoti,
Jake dhyani sahaj agha nasai,
sahaj mite jam chhoti."*

*[Sadho, I slept into Alakh Niranjan,
Through the divine Grace of the Sadguru,
Purified by the nectar of the soul,
(I reached where)
There was no second person;
(There I experienced)
Beyond all Knowledge
The Knowledge-Compassionate,
The Light behind all Light -
Whose submerged dhyani
Cleanses away all sins,
And frees from the clasp of Death.]*

After I completed reading the delightfully inspiring Hindi verse, Sree Sree Maa began, "Alakh Niranjan is a name for Parabrahman where 'alakh' refers to the pristine

Existence-Consciousness which is the divine primordial Light-matrix of all Jyoti; dissolution of the atma-satta into which takes one to nirvikalpa maha-nirvan samadhi-pada leading to the realization of an eternal, imperishable state of Parabrahman. Manifesting this alakh-nirajan nature of Parabrahman through its descent into the physical form displayed in full public gaze for almost two kalpas, was the Living Shiva of Kashi – Mahatma Trailanga Swami - the jivan-mukta, bhagwat-vetta, shining light of the supreme divine.

Holding the divine mantle as the ‘Sri Jagannatha-swarupa’ he guided the spiritual ship of this sacred land as its central helmsman covering the period of almost three hundred and fifty plus years bridging the gap between the two direct Krishna avatars, namely Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Haripurusha Prabhu Jagadbandhu, covering the last phase of Kali-yuga as Kali progressed into Dwapara in its reverse cycle, working closely with Nanga Baba, Mahavatar Babaji Maharaj and Krishna-Dwaipayan Vyas. As a special embodied avatar of the Sri Krishna swarupya-attained sage Brahmarshi Vashishta, through divine directive, Mahatma Trailanga Swami remained the cornerstone of the great spiritual movements and upheavals of the era. It is therefore natural, as you have already observed, that almost all other great yogi-rishis of that time who had descended under the divine order connected with him in some way or the other. Throughout recorded history, in pilgrimage after pilgrimage, event after event we hear about him as an immaculately perfected, infinitely powerful yogi with unimaginable spiritual powers manifesting the active maha-nirvana state of Godhood, rarely seen in full public view below the

Himalayas, before so many people for so long a period. But, away from public view, yet well known to the great Mahatmas and Devatas, this great personality took many other simultaneous embodiments to bring about an unbelievable spiritual renaissance in the dark age of Kali Yuga.

This sage of ages eternal, a torchbearer of spiritual manifestation in this universe since time immemorial, is highly respected and revered by the sages and gods alike. That is why, from the depths of my self-realization, I would like to give you a glimpse of my Shiva-Guru-like maha avatar’s inner work through other saint embodiments that he took during his Trailanga Swami life-span so that you may all feel his exemplary omnipresence in the fortification of sanatan satya-dharma, and through that appreciative reverence, receive his merciful grace in these difficult times.

During his physical life-time he emanated several of sparks of himself to revive the principal post-Vedic philosophical currents of self-realization and devotion - symbolized primarily by the forms of Shiva, Rama, Krishna and the Divine Mother - that keep the spiritual ark of this ancient civilization directed towards the shores of the supramental divine - acting as its pre-eminent helmsman, a work that he has been doing from the beginning of creation as Brahmarshi Vashishta. As Trailanga, he sat ensconced as the Jivanta Mahadeva (or Paramshiva), presenting the epitome of Yogic perfection and anchoring the other embodiments. He spread the other principally gyana-bhakti oriented paths through exemplary lives of his alter-egos.

To re-enliven Purushottam Sri Rama spiritual legacy of atma sadhana and navada bhakti, he took birth as Goswami Tulsidas, whose Sri Ramcharit Manas - a version of

the Ramayana written in the regional vernacular (Awadhi) - combining foundational philosophy and land-marking social reforms - resurrected the spiritual and social lives of people in the heartland of northern India. He followed it up as Mahatma Janardani, reinforcing Sri Ramamahima in the same social milieu. Actually this was a continuity of his ongoing work of spreading Navada-Bhakti in the minds of the local people (beyond the priestly class) which he had initiated earlier as Sri Kritibas Ojha, the medieval poet who was one of the earliest to present the Ramayana in a local language - Bengali in Ojha's case - ushering in a devotional revolution of sorts in rural Bengal as if preparing them for the imminent advent of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

In a sequence of overlapping lives as a devotee of the Divine Mother, he took birth as Kabikinkan Ramprasad Sen, Sadhak Kamalakanta and Dasarathi Ray in Bengal and Parashar in Gaya, spreading a unique devotion-driven style the Shakti-sadhana seed sown by another great sage - Krishnananda Agambagis (who had appeared along the time of Mahaprabhu and lived a long life initiating several Mother-devotees including Ramprasad).

This venerable sage of the ages, Vashishta, had earlier worked with the Rishi Mandala to set the foundations for the advent of Krishna-avatar Sri Chaitanya and revival of Radha-Krishna leela-madhurya-rasa sadhana when, as Jayadeva, he composed the masterpiece 'Geet-Govindam', following it up as Dwija Chandidas prior to Mahaprabhu and as Govindadas Kaviraj, just after. He also demonstrated in practice the iconic 'simple living, high thinking' life of a philosopher-teacher as the desireless, self-abnegating and dedicated Buno Ramnath of Nabadwip.

These streams culminated in a grand finale through the life of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, with all currents merging into one unique manifestation of divine avatarhood demonstrating the oneness of all these paths. It was around this time that Prabhu Jagadbandhu appeared on earth as a Krishna-avatar Sadguru. Soon after Prabhu Jagadbandhu took up the mantle, Sri Ramakrishna and Trailanga Swami physically met and drew down the curtain to this almost four century old saga. The great sage, has however continued his divine manifestations through different overlapping and subsequent lives. For example, as Sadhak Bamakshepa he came to revive Vashishta's age-old Tara sadhana." I jovially remarked, "So now I know why Trailanga Swami remained silent so much, He had much work all around to witness and handle!!" Sree Sree Maa laughed, "You are right. But he hardly ever reveals what he will do next."

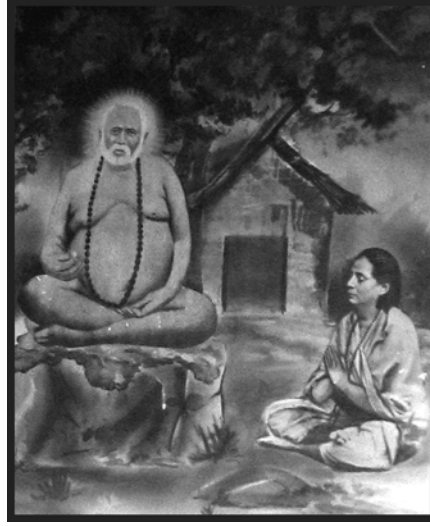
I could not resist myself, "So that meeting in which Swami-ji and Sri Ramakrishna interacted through finger signals was their crucial decision making meeting of leela culmination?" Sree Sree Maa began laughing, "I knew what was going on in your mind. The 'juicy' part for you to consider is whether Sri Ramakrishna raised one finger first and then two as if asking to confirm - 'Are we one or two separate personalities?' and Trailanga Swami first raised one finger and then two fingers joined to supposedly reinforce his belief - 'Yes, we are one, and also separate, in conjoined Sri Jagannath-Balarama forms; though in essence we are one and the same' - which they indeed were." I chuckled with joy, imagining in my own way, how they may have interacted. "There is also some vagueness as to whether Trailanga Swami

had married or not”, I commented. Sree Sree Maa said, “Our Sri Sri Baba told me that Trailanga Swami’s wife’s name was Rukmini Devi.” Finding a rare opportunity I pushed in the next curiosity question, “Shankari Mata was a beloved disciple-rishi of Trailanga Swami. So she must have been someone very close to him in her origins I suppose?” “She was Rishi Pundarika, Vashishta and Arundhati’s elder daughter”, replied Sree Sree Maa.

I now took up another pending query, “Maa, what is the relationship between Mahavatar Babaji Maharaj and Mahatma Trailanga Swami? Except for Lahiri Mahashay and Trailanga Swami’s well known respect and affection for each other, or some of his disciples like Pranabananda-ji and Sri Yuktswar referring to or visiting the Living Shiva, the only place where we find some direct reference to Babaji is about Shankari Mai Jew meeting Babaji Maharaj in the presence of Lahiri Mahashay. We know that Shankari Mata was the Swami’s ‘manas kanya’. Sree Sree Maa immediately replied back, “They need not interact in public. Why should they? For example, if Sri Loknath Brahmachari has not spoken of his interaction with Trailanga Swami in the Himalayas, would anyone have come to know? In any case, have you forgotten about Sri Manick Lal Dutt, the reclusive rishi-disciple of Babaji Maharaj? See what is written in the Red Book and the Bengali book Jibanabhas.” I immediately recollected what I had read these books earlier in connection with the very interesting meeting

of Sir Francis Younghusband with Babaji Maharaj and the enchanting experiences of Sri Dutt.

Manick Lal’s grandfather, Sri Kali Charan Dutt, a jeweller of repute, had left his home in a split moment’s decision when his great



Trailanga Swami with Shankari Mata

Guru suddenly appeared in his office room and asked, ‘Will you not come?’ Kali Charan, an affluent family man, simply replied ‘I am ready, my Lord’, and went away with his Guru instantly, leaving behind everything as it is at that very state including the shop office open and the keys on the jewel-safe. A week later, a letter came from Kali Charan telling his son, Shyama Charan Dutt, that he had left with his

Guru and it would be futile searching for him. Looking at the letter and identifying that it had been posted from Varanasi, Shyama Charan went there in search of his father. Through a queer turn of fate, Shyama Charan also met his Gurudeva there, who was none other than Trailanga Swami. It is Trailanga Swami who had forecast the birth of Manick Lal and I quote from the Red Book, ‘In harmony with the divine dispensation, a well-known saint in light, named Trailanga of Kashi, known to be the Guru of the Maharaja of Ramnagar, amidst his frequent vows of stringent speechlessness, opened his mouth to say, to my father, who was his pet pupil, that is first child (meaning me) would be born in Dhanu Rasi. It is a most condescending favour, in which, this saint added, that this child, when grown in grace, would in the voice of one speaking behind, communicate to the

regenerate ones, the first-hand experiences of God's redeeming grace.' It is very interesting to note that Shyama Charan also received similar revelations from Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa as Manick Lal writes, 'Amidst the senses, naturally sunk in sleep, spoke another Paramhansa named Sri Sri Ramakrishna, to my father, that by forty years hence, his house would be a most delightful retreat, whereto would be would be resorted, men from far and near'. Later Sri Manick Lal came to know that his grandfather's mysterious Sri Gurudeva was the same as his own – Sri Kailash Behari Babaji Maharaj, as Manick-babu would refer to the Mahavatar.

I replied to Sree Sree Maa, "Yes indeed, Sri Manick Lal Dutt is another interesting connection. See even Sri Ramakrishna is in the loop here! So is Vishuddhananda Paramhansa of Gyangunj, where Mahavar Babaji is present as Mahatapa. It's a pity that Manick Lal babu's Puja room is now so dilapidated that I could not go there - the roof has caved in. But Maa, what is the special significance of Dhanu Rasi mentioned by Trailanga Swami?" Sree Sree Maa explained, "Not only was Manick Lal Dutt born in that astrological position, but it has a deeper spiritual meaning. When the mind (mon) is surrendered to God (becoming anugato mon), it receives enlightenment of the anu (atomic soul) and the self-realized one is called Monu. After this, when within this Monu's consciousness sounds (dhwani) of Sri Bhagwan's amrit-vani echoes, then it acquires the name of dhanu. The satta who is capable of holding (dharan) on to dhanu is a dhanurdhar or the yogic-archer. In dwapara this dhanu was held by mahavir dhanurdhar Partha or Arjuna. That is why Sri Krishna, when

elucidating on the surest way to spiritual victory and eternal prosperity, proclaims in the Gita,

*'Yatra Yogeshwarah Krishnah,
Yatra Partho Dhanurdharah
Tatra Shreer Vijayo Bhootih,
Dhruvaa Neetir Matir Mama.'*

Sri Manick Lal Dutt was a true dhanurdhar in whom the Yogeshwar Mahavatar Babaji Maharaj worked as 'the voice of one speaking behind' foretold by Trailanga Swami."

"I understand Maa, but there must be a much deeper eternal relationship between Trailanga Swami and Mahavatar Babaji Maharaj in the setting of the spiritual order?" I asked. Sree Sree Maa replied, "They are two avatar personalities, one is the great Sanat Kumara and the other, Vashishta. They along with several others were requested to descend from Brahmaloaka into this earthly world, Prithivi, by Rishi Kardama, the governing Prajapati of this world, to usher in the divine order. Sanat Kumara descended as Kapil Muni, the divine avatar son of Rishi Kardama. Kardama had nine divine daughters all of whom he got married to great sages. He gave Arundhati's hand to Vashishta. So Vashishta is not only Kardama's manas putra but also his son-in-law. The sages work in harmonious synchrony, though very few know. Does that satisfy you? And I know what you are thinking. Don't write it." I smiled, knowing that Maa reads my mind like a book. I said, "Ok, I will not write, but I will definitely tell it to people when they ask me in private", and we had a good laugh together.

**-By Sri Partha Pratim Chakrabarti,
Her Blessed Child**