

The Nath Society

NAVA NATHA: A NEW NATH HISTORY

MAHENDRANATH and his LINEAGES



Sri Gurudev Mahendranath "Dadaji"

I want to take this centenary moment to honour our magnificent Guru. It has been almost twenty years since he died. My memory is fading. Nonetheless at an ever increasing frequency, I experience moments of “Aha! that’s what he meant!”. Or “How did he do that?” when a little bomb of an event, with roots back to Mehmdabad, goes off in my face. I find a little thread of information he left lying around and when I pull on it, out pops the genie. Mahendranath was, above all, an inscrutable and powerful magician working for the benefit and improvement of our reality. His world view was cosmic in scale, his tools were sub atomic in size.

Thank you Cosmos, Creators, Mothers and Laws of Karma for His Existence!



Kanchenjunga in Sikkim



Kulavadhut Satpuranand

This article is the result of my recent trip to Sikkim to meet with Sri Kulavadhut Satpuranand. He gave me information about Mahendranath and his connections to the earliest wellsprings of Nathism and to the still existing Uttara Kaula sect. I am not an academic, I cannot read Sanskrit. I have not done any of the original research that lead to the development of these theories. I give a very quick gloss of reasons why I hold the information received from Kulavadhut Satpuranand in such high regard. Another reason is that so much of it corresponds to my own intuition on the matter, to my short experience traveling among the general population of Naths and Nath Aghoris in India and to a large degree, pondering long forgotten conversations with Mahendranath.

I think Kulavadhut has found something very exciting here. I feel it connects us to a spiritual history with which many of us can resonate. The history of the Naths contains much more than the Vedantic religiosity, both puritanical and patriarchal, that we meet in modern Nathism. In this context Mahendranath has always appeared as an idiosyncratic rogue, teaching with a combination of wonderful imagination and unique experience. It now appears highly mysterious, how he was able to connect with a hidden history and know a great deal about a forgotten tradition of unthinkable antiquity. This is what he passed on to us.

I must warn the reader that I cannot defend these ideas. This is my understanding of what I was told by Kulavadhut. He will not be interested in defending what he (or I) says nor in fighting with the gravely offended. He has been very generous with his time and knowledge and scholarship. Unfortunately he has not had the chance to check what I have written for accuracy. Perhaps one day he will write an account of his researches complete with footnotes and index. Meanwhile this should generate curiosity, research and discussion. Maybe a good argument or two?



"in a more pensive mood.."

I recently travelled to Sikkim to meet Kulavadhut Satpuranand, familiarly called Khyapa Baba. He is Bengali, around 50 years old and has lived mostly in Gangtok, Sikkim for the past 30 years. He is a well-known and well-educated scholar in the field of Tantra, Vajrayana, Naths and Aghora. All these streams also come together through his initiations, lineages and practice. He reads and translates Sanskrit and Apavramsa. Iconography is his specialty. He is also a painter who recently completed ten paintings of the Ten Mahavidyas in a style that is both strictly traditional and still personal in interpretation.

Although they never met, Khyapa Baba has a deeply friendly connection with Mahendranath. They were both initiated into the Uttara Kaula lineage of Pagala Baba of Ranchi, Kulavadhut by Baba Byomshankar Aghori and Ma Maheshwari of Vakreshwar, West Bengal. Hence the name "Kula"- avadhoot. This means that this lineage, the Uttara Kaula is still alive and active in India. Pagala Baba of Ranchi was the disciple of Baba Kalachand who was the disciple of Baba Pagol Haranath of Bangla Desh.



Two thrones and a circle

However, the the path taken by Kulavadhut and the path taken by westerners could not be more divergent. Kulavadhoot was born into a family where Tantric philosophy was embedded into every detail of their lives. He began his spiritual training in childhood under some of the greatest Gurus and Yoginis of this age. For him, Tantra is a science and a difficult skill to attain. His education most closely resembles that of a neuro-surgeon in the west. Instead of learning the neural pathways from a book they are found through direct perception in meditation. The patterns of the energetic linkages between neural centres and chakras become visible in one's own body and the bodies of others. Knowledge of the energetic patterns and structures of the body is just the beginning. The discipline required to achieve this knowledge of energy biology is also required in the everyday life of the student and practitioner. He and his students are re-creating the original patterns of the Tantric Life. I never thought I would see a Kula in this modern world, but I saw those patterns being lived in the day to day in Gangtok. It has been a revelation to me.



lost in the music

The Ganachakra Feast was an experience of ease, delight, discipline and immense dignity. The ritual was profound, traditional, full of gravity and power. It was repeated every night. Music, singing and the occasional spontaneous dancing were also part of the feast. A small drum and a one-stringed ektar were enough to start the party. Extemporaneous verses in two or three languages poured out of Khyapa Baba, accompanied by laughter and appreciation from the circle.

Mahendranath had his own mysterious reasons for writing that the Uttara Kaula Tradition would end with his death. The cult continues in India to this day.

Most modern people have no possibility to study and learn the patterns of this cult tradition except under difficult and rare circumstances. John Power, Vilasanath, was appointed the task of bringing to light the key ideas, the gems of this tradition. He was given four texts by Mahendranath to work with. He recently published the “**Nu Tantras of the Uttarkaulas**” in response to this directive. I don't know enough to judge how much Dadaji captured of the essence of the Uttar Kaulas and how much more could be necessary to create a modern western equivalent, but the “Nu Tantras” gets the ball rolling.

Time and again, those of us who have gone in search of information about the Adi Naths have come back empty handed. It appears modern Naths have never heard of the Adi Naths. My

personal conclusions were that the Adi Naths were a pre-Gorakshnath group who held more to the buddhist Tantric teachings of Matsyendranath and had become a one man at a time, mouth-to-ear cult over the centuries.



a different kind of trishul

We have all presumed that Adi Nath, the founder of the Naths, is Lord Shiva, Mahadev. The Jains consider Adi Nath to be their first Tirthankara. He is also known as Rishaba. This man appears in the Srimad Bhagavatam as an exemplar of the Avadhoot. He refers to teachers earlier than himself. He is claimed to be the first Shiv-avatara by Shaivites, first Guru of the Shaktas, and the first Buddha of this era known as Vipassin Buddha. The Bon teachings may also be his. His consort was Tripuraamba of Mount Abu, who became the founding influence of the “Old Matriarchs”, the Tripurasundaries. He is considered to have lived in the Vedic period (see Frawley “Gods Sages and Kings” for an idea of how long ago that could have been) and to have been a strong opponent of the Vedic world view. His approach was shamanic in its nature-based teachings. This is in fact, the first Nath Guru and founder of the Adi Nath lineage. He predates the great epics Ramayana and Mahabharata and even Lord Krishna. His student was the sage Agastya. Agastya was a teacher of Dattatreya, widely considered to be the semi-divine founder of most Nath panths and many other cults and lineages of India. Parasurama was the student of Dattatreya.

Thousands of years later we meet Padmasambhava also known as Swayambunath, among many other names. Swayambunath is the Guru of Matsyendranath, founder of the exuberantly expressive Yoginikula. (.. his consort was Lalita Sundari who may well have been a lineage holder of the Tripuraamba line of the Tripurasundaries or Yogeshwaris as they were called by this time. Eventually they are assimilated by the Kashmiri Shaiva tradition known as the Lalitas following Lallah Bai orders.) At this point the Naths are Agamist (meaning that they partook of all five non-Vedic streams of knowledge; Shaivite, Shakta, Vaishnav, Jain and Buddhist), Tantric, Vajrayanist and non-Vedic. Padmasambhava became notorious for promoting education and respect for female practitioners. This behaviour lost him his post as head of Nalanda University. In fact he had to run for his life! As Swayambunath he was the founder of the Nava Natha or Neo Nath revival. It institutionalized Vajrayana Tantra as the Nath road to Liberation. In this case, Nava means “neo” not “nine”. I am not ready to relinquish the ideal of the Nine Naths despite this

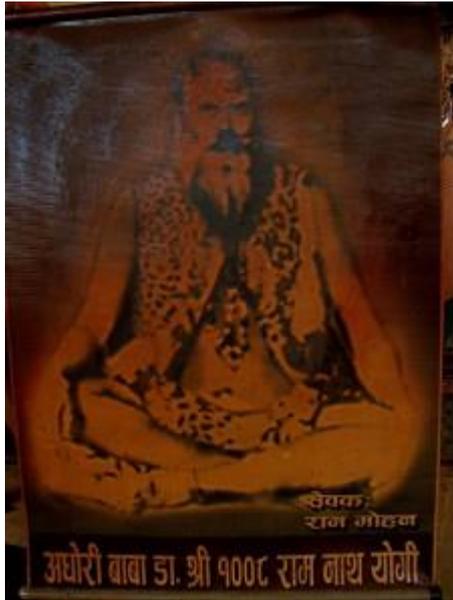
other meaning to the word. This is an elaboration of the old Nath Order of Adinatha. The Adi Naths divided at this point and many went to the Dasnami Orders under Shankaracharya. Much of the division hinged on conflicting views of Duality, Non-Duality and NonDuality/Duality/NonDuality. (I think)



Padmasambhava/Swayambunath

History takes a turn with the arrival of the immensely influential figure of Gorakshnath, the most famous student of Matsyendranath. Gorakshnath lived somewhere between 850 and 1100. He is the one who is believed to have written the first Nath manuals in local languages and the one who codified the Nath practice. He is the modernizer and organizer of the tradition we know today. Gorakshnath was not a good student. He was very arrogant and took to lecturing his elders, the guru brothers of Matsyendranath, such as Kanpha. His punishment was to core his ears and wear the heavy kundal earrings, today the distinctive mark of darshani Naths. He was forbidden the higher teachings of Tantra and Aghora. Gorakshnath took the Naths into the Vedic/Vedantic fold for the first time in its history. He codified the Nath practices, wrote extensively in local languages and promoted his views with skill and fervour. His remarkably revolutionary teachings, in the sense that he reversed the entire Nath world view, became the standard of Nathism today.

Traveling among modern Naths in India I was struck by the fact that they did not resonate with any of Mahendranath's teachings. Dadaji wore neither kundal earrings nor the janeu (nadi). He taught none of the daily rituals of modern Naths and his tantric teachings and nudity found absolutely no correspondence with modern Naths who are very puritanical. Except for the Shakta Aipanth, the Goddess has no place among the Naths of today. In fact Mahendranath has been teaching the world view and technology of the Adi Naths, going back in history to the time before Gorakshnath, tapping into a spring of knowledge that goes far into pre-history. He spoke disapprovingly of the innovations of modern Nathism with the passion of someone very familiar with earlier days. He mocked monasteries and ashrams for Naths, he mocked their life long celibacy and their disdain for the female and the Goddess. He considered modern Naths to be either fanatics or vagabonds and thieves. He was never one to hold back his contempt and anger, was our Guru. He was acting like a true Nath.



Dr. Ramnath Aghor

Among the Naths I knew in India, Dr. Ramnath Aghori was a well known, feared and much admired man. Dr Ramnath Aghori, was a very famous Nath Aghori. He lived for 217 years and for much of a century he was the head of the Nath Akhara at Gorakhpur. He gained access to the newly created Royal Library of Nepal. There he found the history of the Naths from before the time of Gorakshnath in ancient, mouldering, palm leaf manuscripts. Wanting to investigate further, he travelled to Samye Monastery in Tibet (Padmasambhava/Swambhunath made the building of Tibet's first monastery possible) but he was refused entry because he was a darshani Gorakshnathi Nath.

Traveling back to Nepal he encountered Tibbotinath or Chakhtha Rimpoche who took him to meet Baba Byom Shankar Aghori who was said to be the last direct inheritor of the lineage of Swayambunath. Baba Byom Shankar Aghori was also over 200 years old, seven feet tall and blue-eyed. Here he learned the Tantric Vajrayana Nath Aghori technologies of the earlier Naths. He retraced his steps to Samye Monastery and was then welcomed to stay and study. He returned to Nepal, full of the knowledge he had gained and ready to overturn the the Gorakshnathi heresy. He came into deep conflict with the late King Virendra and the religious hierarchies of Nepal. The Storm of Miracles ensued. Disheartened, Dr. Ramnath Aghori withdrew to Kolkata where he died in 1982. He left his legacy to Kulavadhut to renew the old order of Naths and to continue the research into that lost knowledge.

Lalita Nath

April 29, 2011

PS Jason Louv, while travelling in Nepal met Tyaginath (Pagalananda) who holds the seat of Ramnath Aghori in Pasupatinath. Tyaginath told him that Aleister Crowley had met Dr. Ramnath Aghori and spent time with him. Crowley told Mahendranath (then Lawrence Miles) to go to India and to seek out Dr. Ramnath Aghori! Certainly Dadaji spent a good deal of time searching for advanced Aghoris, particularly in Benares, before declaring them a completely decrepit if not a defunct cult which, of course, they are not.

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