

SADGURU SWAMI NIGAMANANDA

FOR YOUNG READERS

Preface

*Nityashuddham Nirabhasam Nirakaram Niranjanam
Nityabodham Chidanandam GuruBrahmam Namamyaham*

The book Sadguru Swami Nigamananda For Young Readers is being published by the divine blessings Sadguru Swami Nigamananda. It is offered as a gift of love and as a treasure trove of knowledge for young readers whose primary language is English. This book is a transliteration of the book "Pilanka Nigamananda" which was translated into Oriya from the original Bengali text written by Ma Narayani Devi, the adopted daughter of Sadguru Swami Nigamananda and published by Nilachala Saraswata Sangha, Puri, Odisha, India.

While every effort has been made to preserve the style and the flavor of the original text, some modifications and adaptations have been made to enhance readability. The need for this book in English became obvious when a group called "Young Aspirants" started meeting and having periodic but regular meetings in the United States and in the United Kingdom. The "Young Aspirants" are children of immigrants from Orissa, India, but unlike their parents, have adopted English as their primary medium of instruction and the language of choice for both reading and for writing. The occasional readings during the "Sunday School" have now been compiled as a book. It is our hope that this book will inspire kids all over the world, enthusiastically offered to and read by children of all ages.

Sadguru Swami Nigamananda was a great sage and an enlightened saint born in India. He lived an exemplary life. At a very tender age he gained spiritual enlightenment by following the process of Tantra, Gyana, Yoga, and Prema. Through his writings, and through subsequent discourse and advice to his disciples, he made these four-fold avenues of spiritual enlightenment simple and self-evident, all achievable in the course of living a simple, ordinary life in general human society.

The law of the Universe is such that, from time to time, the Divine takes the human form, an *Avatar*, to cleanse the world of evil. But there are also ways to help individual men and women realize and become aware of their "true" self, and thus transcend to a higher level of consciousness. The revelation of these paths is made possible through the guidance and the blessings of a *Sadguru*, a true guide and an enlightened coach. Further, with the help, the guidance, and the blessings of a *Sadguru* one gets spiritually awakened, and enters a life of unending joy and bliss. Thakura Nigamanada is such a *Sadguru*! He has assured his disciples that he will continue to live in the inner depths of their hearts and guide them when they forgo their ego to willfully accept him and learn to "love him a little".

This book for the younger disciples is an introduction to the life of Thakura Nigamananda who out of his compassion returned to society after his enlightenment to show us the way, the right path to a virtuous and abundant life.

It is for the young to learn more about him, and by knowing about him, learn to love him and accept him in their lives. There is no need for Thakura Nigamananda's disciples to look for a successor Guru. He took the mantle of *Sadguru* only after receiving assurance from the Mother of the Universe that his disciples would gain salvation in no more than three lives. It is our prayer, that over time, our revered Sadguru will become Guru for all men and women spread across the continents (Biswaguru) who voluntarily accepts him as such after knowing him and reading his teachings. This will happen as more and more of us become aware of, and embrace him as our spiritual guide, and learn to "love him a little" by living a life worthy of his ideals and his principles.

The guidance and the supervision of our Central Body, Nilachala Saraswata Sangha, Puri, Odisha, India, is gratefully acknowledged and the combined collaborative effort of the young and the old (or, not so young) of America Saraswata Sangha (AMSAS) for this book is also recognized. Members of AMSAS rejoice this publication. Yet, we remain humble and accept responsibility for all errors and omissions.

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(Vijaya Dashami)

Bijoy Sahoo

President, America Saraswata Sangha

Chapter 1

The district of Nadiya in the state of Bengal in India has been a very famous place since a long time. The renowned Vaisnav saint Mahaprabhu Shri Chaitanyadev was born at Nabadwipa, a holy place in this district. It is also the birthplace of several Vaisnav saints and a number of holy men. At that time, Nabadwipa was an important seat of learning in Bengal. After the birth of Chaitanyadev, Nabadwipa also became famous for 'Bhakti Dharma', the cult of devotional worship of God. The people of Nadiya were highly influenced by the tradition of harmony of Jnana (knowledge) and Bhakti (devotion) prevailing in this district for a long time.

Kutabpur is a small village in the then subdivision of Meherpur in the district of Nadiya. Now Meherpur is a full-fledged district in the present Bangladesh, a new small country adjoining India. It is situated on the bank of the river Vairab. Kutabpur village is a place of residence of various kinds of people including Muslims, weavers, blacksmiths and pottery makers. A few upper caste Hindus also lived in this village.

Bhubanmohan Bhattacharya, a devout Hindu Brahmin, was an important person of the village. The villagers respected him as a kindhearted, learned and pious Hindu. His family surname was Chattopadhyay. Since their family had the legacy of serving as priests, the villagers showed respect to the family by addressing them as 'Bhattacharya family'. Therefore, Bhubanmohan was known in the locality as Bhubanmohan Bhattacharya and not as Bhubanmohan Chattopadhyay.

Bhubanmohan led a very happy family life. Though they were not very rich, there was no dearth of adequate food and clothes for the family members. His devoted wife Yogendramohini was like the goddess Laxmi. Her nickname was Manikasundari. She was a very caring and loving wife. She managed the household very ably. She was also very kind-hearted and took care of the poor and the needy people of the area. She never let them return from her house empty handed. The villagers liked Yogendramohini very much because of her graceful, loving, caring, pious, and serving nature.

The Bhattacharya couple was very unhappy as they did not have a male child. They had two daughters. However, they were very eager to have a son. Hence, Yogendramohini used to observe many religious rituals wishing to have a son and for this, prayed the goddess Mangala-Chandi, the family deity. She was especially unhappy because, in the absence of a male child, they won't have someone to carry their family name even if they had been very pious and led an ideal household life.

The Bhattacharya family was worshipper of the Mother goddess for generations. Bhubanmohan and Yogendramohini became absorbed in worshipping their family goddess for being blessed with a son.

It was the month of Ashwin in the year 1286 of the Bengali Calendar (October, 1879 A.D.) Bhubanmohan was returning from Radhakantapur, the village of his father-in-

law. At the dusk time, he decided to perform his evening prayer on the bank of the river Vairab. He was about to get into the river water to wash his hands and feet. He suddenly noticed a bright glowing object like a little star fell from the sky into the river. It travelled very close to him as if some rays from it touched his body. The light of the object was so bright that he was bewildered and became stupefied. However, he finished his evening prayer after washing his hands and feet. Then he returned home.

A few days after this incident, Yogendramohini had a wonderful dream. She felt that she was expecting a baby because of the Kartikabrata, she was observing. Her joy knew no bounds. Thereafter she spent more time in worship and prayer. The Bhattacharya couple was blessed with a son on Thursday in Jhulana Purnima, the full moon night of the month of Shravan (August) in the year 1880 A.D. Yogendramohini was then staying at Radhakantapur, her mother's place. Hence her first son was born in the maternal village of Radhakantapur. This son, later on, became the famous Guru and Saint Paramahansa Paribrajacharya Srimat Swami Nigamananda Saraswati Dev.

Yogendramohini's mother and her in-laws were very happy with the birth of a cute and handsome looking baby. Bhubanmohan recollected that experience in the evening when he saw the bright little star falling into the Vairab river. The study of the horoscopes revealed that the son was born with a powerful zodiac position. Bhubanmohan was proud of his son as he thought that someday his son would become a great and very famous man. He was very happy to know the bright future of his son. After consulting with all family members he named his first son Nalinikanta. The literal meaning of Nalinikanta is the ever radiating sun. The name 'Nalini' means lotus flower. The petals of lotus open up with the rising of the sun. Hence the other name of the sun is 'Nalinikanta', the dearest one of the lotus. This name expresses the serenity, the kindness, the radiance and the love of the sun. The lotus grows in the mud of a pond. The sun provides it light and love to open up to a fully blossomed flower. That is the loving relationship between the sun and the lotus. When his father named him Nalinikanta, he did not know that this name would bear testimony to its inner significance and his son spreading radiance as the sun would, one day, become Sadguru Nigamananda to illuminate the hearts of hundreds of thousands of people with the light of true knowledge.

As he was the eldest son, everyone in the family liked him. No one wanted to punish him for his naughtiness and childish pranks. Hence he did not fear anyone. He was very headstrong and used to do whatever he thought to be right. At that time, all the kith and kin of the Bhattacharya family lived as one big extended family. The Bhattacharya family was also very large and lived in the village, very close to one another as a cluster.

Nalinikanta spent a lot of time playing with the kids from his neighborhood. The villagers had heartfelt fondness towards the well-built, strong, and handsome Nalinikanta. Nalinikanta also used to visit everyone's house and maintained cordial relationship with the neighbors. He was very happy mingling with others and made

them happy too. From childhood, he was extremely fearless, a straight shooter, upright and witty. He used to oppose any wrong doing committed by anyone in the village irrespective of age and status. His arguments were so reasonable and appropriate that the older and wiser villagers were not able to contradict him. From young to old, everyone in the village liked him, as they knew that he was an upright kid. He usually did not do anything wrong or told a lie. Especially the younger kids were attracted to him. Hence he became their leader from a very young age. The kids respected him much and also feared him at the same time. Mother Yogendramohini being a judicious lady had to tolerate young Nalinikanta's such type of behavior. Sometimes Nalinikanta refused to obey his mother.

When Nalinikanta reached the school-going age, his parents sent him to the village primary school for study. The teacher at the school used to ask all children to bring some gifts like rice, dal etc. from their houses everyday. He also strictly ordered them not to disclose to their parents about these gifts they had to bring. The kids had to get these things without their parent's knowledge. Simple-minded Nalinikanta asked the teacher, "How can I bring molasses, tamarind and pickles without telling my parents?" The teacher said indifferently, "Why? You have to steal these things from your house without their knowledge." Nalinikanta did not appreciate his teacher's answer. He started to think. "What kind of teacher is he?" From very early childhood, Nalinikanta knew that it was a great sin to steal. He objected what the teacher had said. He replied very firmly and clearly, "I cannot steal". The teacher got angry with him and ordered, "If you cannot steal, you have to tell a lie to the parents that you are taking those things for some other people". Fear of punishment made Nalini lie for a day or two to get a few things from home that the teacher wanted. However, his conscience pricked him. One day, Nalinikanta came to the school and fearlessly told the teacher, "I can't lie everyday to bring you things that you want." The teacher got very angry and started to beat him. That day Nalinikanta went home and informed everything to his parents. They were proud and happy with the courage and boldness of their son. Nalinikanta completed his primary education in his village Kutabpur. Then he pursued his future studies in Dariyapur Middle English School staying at Radhakantapur, his maternal aunt's house. While reading in this school he mixed with the people of all sections and castes. As a result, the pride of being born in higher caste and any narrowness of mind disappeared from him. There came a sea change in his outlook and attitude.

Nalinikanta was very intelligent and talented. He concentrated on studies. Since he started to focus more on studies, he could not spend enough time to play with his friends. However, he never missed a chance to be with his friends to see a drama or folk plays performed in their area. In those days, popular theatrical performances mostly included religious topics and mythological stories. The bands played and performed religious chanting.

From childhood, Nalinikanta was attracted to singing and acting. Once he heard that there was a touring theatre party in a nearby village. Thinking that his mother might not allow him to go there in the night, he got up from bed, left the house

without his mother's knowledge and started towards the nearby village with his friends. On the way, he came across a ghost and fell unconscious. From that day, mother Yogendramohini did not allow him to see any theatrical performance. Nalinikanta was very much interested to see the play about Lord Siva and Parvati. Especially the mythological play on Dakshya Yagna made him spellbound. During the play he was so much engrossed in the play that he could not know whether those actors were the real Siva and Parvati.

A very strange and amazing incident occurred in Nalinikanta's life when he was seven or eight years old. It was said earlier that the Bhattacharya family was dedicated to the worship of Mother Goddess, the mother of the universe. One evening, Nalinikanta went to light a candle in the Chandi mandap, the place of worship of the mother goddess by the Bhattacharya family. Upon arrival, he saw that there was a sudden illumination over the holy pitcher kept there. He could see in that light, the goddess Durga as a young girl with her ten hands. Nalinikanta was afraid to visualize the mother goddess. He screamed out of fear and ran to his mother. On hearing about the incident, his mother said, "My dear, you saw the mother of the universe. Just as I am your mother, she is the mother of the universe. I am your mother for this life but she is the mother of the whole universe forever." Child Nalinikanta was extremely pleased on hearing his mother's explanation. From childhood, Nalinikanta had immeasurable devotion for Sati, the wife of Shiva and the earlier incarnation of Parvati. Sati left her mortal body on hearing insults of Shiva, her consort. This fact filled Nalinikanta's mind with unprecedented amazement and joy. After visualizing goddess Durga and hearing about her true identity, Nalinikanta's devotion towards the mother goddess increased. He liked to watch with deep interest the plays that enacted the stories about Shiva and Parvati. Thus child Nalinikanta grew up and reached the age of his sacred thread ceremony, a must for a boy of Hindu Brahmin caste.

Chapter 2

A Hindu who also belonged to the Brahmin caste has to wear a sacred thread as per the customs of the Hindu religion. Wearing of the sacred thread ceremonially takes place during boyhood. Nalinikanta's sacred thread ceremony was performed when he was eleven years old. During the ceremony, as per the prevailing custom, the young *brahmachari* boy takes three steps after receiving alms before his mother takes him back home. However, Nalinikanta did not listen to other's request for stopping after he received the alms. He went four or five steps, turned back and started smiling mischievously. He was instructed repeatedly to walk three steps only and stop. He did not heed that instruction. That made his mother, aunts and other female members of his family apprehensive. As was the prevailing thought then, they believed that this child would one day renounce the world and become a Sannyasi (mendicant).

After Nalinikanta's vision of the goddess Durga, Bhubanmohan took his son to Ramakrishna Paramahansa in Calcutta (Kolkata) and Bhaskarananda Swami of Banaras. They were two famous saints at that time. They predicted the bright future of the child. Swami Bhaskarananda predicted that he would be the king of kings. But the 'alms incident' during the thread ceremony made his mother believe strongly that her son Nalinikanta was not going to remain in the house very long. In those days, the prevailing belief was that the brahmachari would become a Sannyasi if he crossed the three-step boundary after receiving the alms.

Nalinikanta appeared to be a changed boy after the thread ceremony. He started practicing morning and evening rituals and prayers sincerely. But several questions regarding the Hindu religion and its rituals troubled his young mind. From his childhood he was proud to be a Hindu, especially being born of a Brahmin family. He was extremely eager to know more about the essence of the Hindu religion. Even though he read all the scriptures like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in his native language, his thirst for knowledge could not be quenched. He was very eager to know more and more about religion. Unlike any ordinary child, he never thought his work was over as soon as he finished reading a textbook. Whatever he read, he remained deeply engrossed over the subjects in the book. In his school, he read gladly all the modern books about scientific subject matters. When he read the Hindu scriptures, he was in a dilemma. Explanations about the lunar eclipse, earthquakes etc. in the science textbooks of the school were very different from the descriptions in the religious books and mythologies. The Hindus believed that the great sages and seers wrote the scriptures. A question arose in Nalinikanta's mind: "Are the Hindu scriptures all full of lies or are the scientists wrong?" Nalinikanta could not decide what to believe and what to discard. He continued asking a lot of questions to his teachers at school and the Hindu scholars, but all was in vain.

The eldest son Nalinikanta had been the fruit of his mother's long penance and prayer. Mother Yogendramohini was very fond of her eldest son Nalinikanta. She worried when Nalinikanta started to take a lot of interest in reading religious books.

She pondered whether her son leave the house at an early age and become a mendicant?

From a very young age, Nalinikanta was truthful, bright, upright and sympathetic for others' sorrows. It was virtually impossible to change the decision taken by him. Once while Nalinikanta was returning after having a bath in the nearby river, he found a daughter-in-law misbehaving with her mother-in-law. The daughter-in-law was mercilessly beating her and no one from the crowd, witnessing it, came forward to save the old lady. Young Nalinikanta could not tolerate the daughter-in-law's inhuman behavior to a helpless widowed mother-in-law. As was his character, Nalinikanta immediately intervened and started beating the daughter-in-law. He saved the old mother-in-law from getting further abused by her daughter-in-law. When his mother heard about this incident, she warned Nalinikanta not to poke his nose into other's affairs. Nalinikanta boldly asked mother Yogendramohini, "If you had been in the place of that old lady, could I be a silent spectator?" Later the village elders sat together to decide over the complaint of the daughter-in-law against Nalinikanta. But after listening to both sides they unanimously opined that Nalinikanta did nothing wrong.

Mother Yogendramohini prompted Bhubanmohan to seek the advice from an astrologer about Nalinikanta's horoscope. He learned from a renowned astrologer of that time that he had a chance to get married at an early age. The Bhattacharya couple decided that they would arrange Nalinikanta's marriage as soon as he completed his schooling. The bride ought to be extremely charming, beautiful and need to possess good qualities. Thus, Nalinikanta would not want to leave the house and become a Sannyasi. The couple made up their mind about this and secretly started looking for a suitable bride for Nalinikanta. Nalinikanta had no knowledge of it.

Meanwhile, he became acquainted with the famous writer and literary figure of Bengal, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay who was distantly related to Nalinikanta. He started visiting Bankimchandra frequently for discussion on religious matters and to clear his doubts about religion and spirituality. At that time, Bankimchandra created quite uproar about the Hindu religion amongst the educated community with the publication of a series of essays dealing with the essence of Hindu religion. With Bankimchandra's company, Nalinikanta's thought and ideas about religion started changing slowly. Due to the influence of Bankimchandra's opinion, he thought that the Hindu rituals were mere superstitions. The true religion lies in becoming an ideal human being who can serve society and country after becoming truthful, honest and pure. He was determined to build his character with these ideals and slowly gave up the daily rituals he was doing and worshipping God as he thought that those were only dull and unworthy time-wasting rituals.

One night, while staying at Radhakantapur, for continuing his studies in Dariyapur Middle English School, Nalinikanta had an inauspicious dream about his mother. He became eager to go and visit his mother in his village. Next day, after school hours, he left for Kutabpur with an anxious mind. On arriving at the village he found a

gathering of some village people in front of his house. He was shocked to learn of his mother's death. Later he came to know that his beloved mother had passed away after a brief illness due to sudden attack of cholera. Even in her deathbed she had not forgotten her loving son Nalinikanta and left the message, "Tell Nalini, I am leaving him in the care of the Mother of the universe". Nalinikanta did not forget his mother's last words for him though he hardly understood their implications at that time.

Afterwards, he became an atheist when, in real life, he could neither find nor feel his dead mother any time, even in dream. The same with the Mother of the universe. He thought that the Mother of the universe is a concept and not a reality. Had she existed, she would have appeared before him. He further thought that with one's death everything ends. After that, he lost his interest in the religious rituals and the worship of deities required of a Hindu Brahmin boy.

After his mother's death, Nalinikanta lost his childlike behavior. There came a great change in him. He did not like to bother the elders for anything. He concentrated more on his studies and spent time thinking on how to reduce his father's sorrows. Since his mother passed away, his father was no less sad than him and his brothers. There was no one in the house to take care of him and even cook for him. Nalinikanta thought that he could finish his studies and get a job to help his father. While at school, he read books other than the books included in the curriculum. Among the poems in the textbook he liked the following lines of a poem:

**Beauty, I don't desire; money I don't aspire,
Let me not be busy with the earthly enjoyment.
Oh, Lord this be your gift - may I be healthy and fit,
My time be spent on acts - virtuous and compassionate.**

Nalinikanta was a precocious child. He thought that there was no better wealth than one's health and service to society. What is religion? Nalinikanta thought that religion means becoming rational and doing well to others. One should not be ashamed of hard work. It is rather shameful to be dishonest and weak.

When Nalinikanta was about fourteen years old his friend, philosopher and guide Bankimchandra died. Bankimchandra's death, just after his mother's death, disillusioned him a lot more. However, he did not lose courage. Death of near and dear ones made him more determined in his thought and action. Slowly he became a favorite of the villagers through his good character. Like common Hindu kids, he did not have devotion for the gods and goddesses for achieving any object. He became doubtful about getting one's desired objects if one worshipped the gods and goddesses. On the other hand, his strong belief was that one could get his desirable things through hard work and determination. The sights of monks and hermits used to annoy him. He had a belief that people who were lazy and averse to work became sannyasis and hermits and made a living by other's earnings.

His father Bhubanmohan was an ardent disciple of the famous yogi Bhaskarananda Swami of Varanasi. Bhubanmohan led a virtuous household life. Hence he made it his duty to take care of saints and hermits coming to the village. However, Nalinikanta never appreciated such type of activities of his father. Once, a hermit with matted hair came to their house. His father was very happy to see the hermit and made all arrangements for his comfortable stay and food in their house. As usual, Nalinikanta thought that the hermit must be a cheat. However, he could not say anything out of fear of his father. When the hermit was asleep, he cut one lock of his matted hair with a scissor. The hermit got up from sleep and found the cut portion of his matted haircut. He was very furious and left the place cursing the unknown doer of this mischief. His father never thought that it could have been his son's mischievous deed. Nalinikanta was happy that the hermit had left their house due to the success of his mission. He only laughed inside. He thought how the hermit could be a true saint if he did not conquer his anger? How can such fake hermits benefit the society? Though he did not have devotion towards the gods and goddesses and even if he was an anti-hermits, he was compassionate to ordinary people in distress. Once he saw two boys drowning in the river. Risking his own life, he jumped into the river and saved the two boys. He was a good swimmer. In the village, if a person of lower caste died, the members of the upper caste were reluctant to touch the dead body out of fear of social taboos. Once, an unknown beggar died in their village. No one came forward to perform his funeral and the last rites. But Nalinikanta led a group of friends to perform the last rites and cremated the dead body. He had splendid quality of leadership. He was the first to protest against any injustice committed even by the leaders of the village and the society. He wholeheartedly supported truth and justice. He never missed any chance to oppose any unreasonable behavior of the senior people of the village. Everyone in the village loved and respected him for his strong moral character and uncompromising attitude for observing time-honored principles. Nalinikanta's father was inwardly very much appreciative of him as he heard his son's good deeds and upright attitude.

Nalinikanta's appearance was very pleasant and he was fond of humor. He liked music. He was known for his singing as he had a very gentle melodious voice. Hence he was very much liked by his friends when they were enacting a drama or singing devotional songs. Even though he had little devotion for the gods and goddesses outwardly, he liked devotional songs. He especially liked the songs, which bear indifferent notes towards the worldly affairs. Nalinikanta was a good player of string instruments. He was good at entertaining his friends by playing on the musical instruments and singing devotional songs in a sweet and melodious voice. The youth of the village were not happy if Nalinikanta was not present.

Nalinikanta entered the survey school in Dhaka after passing the eighth standard from Meherpur Higher English School. He was born in a middle class family. He badly needed a degree from a trade school and find a job and earn money. After graduating from a survey school he had a good chance of getting a paying job with a handsome monthly salary. With that hope he thought to continue studies in a

survey school so that he would be in a position to help his old father financially. So he gave up the aspiration of formal higher studies in other educational institutions.

Chapter 3

Nalinikanta got married at the age of seventeen. Due to the extreme desire of his father, Bhubanmohan, and all other family members, he gave his consent for marriage. Bhubanmohan fixed the marriage with the hope that Nalinikanta would be able to maintain his family by taking up a job. Another reason was that he feared that Nalinikanta would leave home to become a Sannyasi as foretold by astrologers. Marriage would prevent him from doing so. Moreover, if his mother Yogendramohini was alive, according to the prevailing customs, they would have got him married even at an early age.

Baidyanath Mukhopadhyay lived at Haliashahar in West Bengal. His eldest daughter Sudhansubala was exceptionally beautiful with a good moral character. She was also good at all types of household work. When Yogendramohini was alive, she had a chance to meet this beautiful girl Sudhansubala. From that time she very much wanted to get her married to Nalinikanta, her son, and have her as her daughter-in-law. Finally the marriage was solemnized at Haliashahar and the newly weds left for Radhakantapur to stay at their maternal aunt's house first. After a few days at Radhakantapur, Nalinikanta realized that his father was cooking food for himself and taking care of the family all by himself at Kutabpur. He decided that they must stay at Kutabpur to relieve his father of the burden of the family affairs and household works. He disclosed this decision to his aunts. They were annoyed and angry by such decision because they hoped that Nalinikanta would become their inheritor for which they spent a lot of money for his education. Nalinikanta knowing fully well that aunts were not going to support his education financially any more, because of this, left Radhakantapur with Sudhansubala who very much appreciated her husband's gesture and decision. At Kutabpur he joined as a teacher in the village school and applied for various suitable jobs.

Bhubanmohan was delighted and proud inwardly because of his son's decision. His daughter-in-law Sudhansubala was extremely caring and proved herself as an efficient housewife. Having such a daughter-in-law, his joy knew no bounds. He never experienced such happiness in life after the death of his wife, Yogendramohini. Leaving his other two sons in their maternal uncle's house in Radhakantapur for their education, he started to live happily in Kutabpur with the daughter-in-law and his youngest son, Ramapada.

For the last two years Nalinikanta was living away from his village. In his absence, his friends in the village were disheartened. Now getting him back in the village they were extremely joyful. With Nalinikanta, they started daily sessions of devotional songs, prayers, chanting, acting etc. Nalinikanta wrote scripts, staged and performed drama and musical plays with his friends. At that time, he wrote a play, 'Taranisen Badha' (Killing of Taranisen) and a novel, 'Sudhansubala' which were published. In addition to these, he also wrote another novel and few other scripts for dramas.

Sudhansubala had profound interest for further studies, so Nalinikanta used to teach her at times. In the village, Nalinikanta was a good example for the youngsters. They tried to follow his exemplar behavior. His jovial and amicable nature brought joy to the villagers. About a year and half after his marriage, Nalinikanta had to leave the village as he got a job as a land surveyor.

Independent-minded, honest and outspoken, Nalinikanta faced many difficulties at his new workplace. He could ever tolerate any type of injustice done by anybody. He never favored corruption or dishonesty in any form. If any higher official put pressure on him to do any unjust things, he was bold enough to refuse to do as asked. For this he had to quit the job without caring for his future. An honest person never goes hungry. Nalinikanta was able to find a new job soon after leaving the old job while fighting for justice and honesty. Gradually, name, fame and money followed him but he was never after them. For his job, he had to stay away from home. But he was very much concerned for Sudhansubala. His primary objective was to lead an exemplary household life. His loving wife Sudhansubala was also inspired by his ideology and his way of thinking.

Both of them, by maintaining virtuous and peaceful married life, lived like Hara and Gouri of the puranic days. They also inspired people in the community to walk on the path of love and righteousness and lead an ideal household life. However, at that time, a tragic incident occurred as a result of which Nalinikanta's life took a different turn.

Chapter 4

One night Nalinikanta was busy working in Narayanpur, at his place of work, in connection with some urgent land settlement cases. There was a lamp on the table in front of him. Suddenly it appeared that the lamp's light became dim. Nalinikanta saw his wife Sudhansubala standing next to the table. Her face seemed pale. Dumbfounded, Nalinikanta thought how she could manage to travel such a long distance from his village to come over to Narayanpur. He thought that it was not really his wife standing, but a shadowy figure of his wife Sudhansubala. After a while, the figure he had seen, disappeared.

Two or three days after the incident, he received a letter from his father saying that Sudhansubala was ill after delivering a baby. A few days later there came the Durgapuja vacation. Nalinikanta came to his village Kutabpur with great anxiety. On reaching his village, he found that his beloved wife Sudhansubala was no more. She had passed away about an hour before he saw her shadowy figure at Narayanpur.

Nalinikanta had no faith in the existence of life after death. But he was, by nature, thoughtful from his childhood. After this incident, he became eager to acquire knowledge about the soul and the other world. He was dumbfounded when he saw Sudhansubala for the first time after her death. Later he thought if he saw her again, he would ask and try to understand life after death and the state of the soul after death. He visualized the astral body of Sudhansubala a couple of times more and became certain that there was some sort of existence after death. Nevertheless, many unanswered questions relating to these troubled him. He wondered why the common people were indifferent to find out truth pertaining to life and death. Nalinikanta started to think about his own death. He thought that it was useless to earn money and live a household life. He thought that nobody knew when death would come. Then he decided that his only duty was to understand life after death and conquer death. But he was overwhelmed with grief due to the untimely death of Sudhansubala and having no faith in the Hindu rituals after her death, he left Kutabpur without performing her final funeral rites.

At Calcutta (Kolkata) while he was arranging documents in connection with a court case, a very strange thing happened in that room. He heard the sweet sound of Sudhansubala's anklets, which seemed to be approaching nearer. Nalinikanta gathered courage and asked in a bold voice, "Who is it?"

There came a prompt reply, "I am your wife Sudha".

"Why don't you appear in person? ", said Nalinikanta.

She replied, "Won't you be afraid?"

Nalinikanta said, "I will be rather greatly pleased, so reveal yourself". She did so and sat near him on the bed. Breaking the silence she asked, "Won't you perform my last rites?" Nalinikanta replied, "How could I do it here? I know that father would perform it there at the village."

“But I would be extremely happy if you would do it for me. You don’t have to do much. Can’t you offer some fruits to me tomorrow morning?” Sudhansubala said. Nalinikanta agreed to this. After a short discussion Sudhansubala’s astral body vanished into thin air.

The very next morning Nalinikanta bought some chosen fruits and sweets from the market that Sudhansubala used to like most. He cut the fruits neatly and placed on a banana leaf with the sweets. Nalinikanta hoped that she would reappear and take them physically. But, no one came and nothing happened. Nalinikanta wondered whether yesterday’s incident was a hallucination or a reality. Disgusted, Nalinikanta extended his hand to eat the food himself. Suddenly there came a voice, “What are you doing? Don’t consume that leftover food that I have already accepted.”

Nalinikanta asked, “How could you eat it?”

Sudhansubala replied, “I am not in physical form. I have already taken the essence of what you have offered to me”.

This incident became a turning point in Nalinikanta’s life. The changed Nalinikanta wanted to understand life after death. In those days, the Theosophical Society run by Madam Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott was very famous. The Theosophical Society was known for its research on life after death. Nalinikanta came to know about this Society and its work from his friends in Calcutta. He took a few days leave from work and went to Adyar near Chennai, the headquarters of the Theosophical Society. In a few days at Adyar, he could master all the knowledge that the Theosophical Society could offer and learn the expertise to talk to the departed soul through a medium. However, he would not be completely contented, as it did not fully serve his purpose. Besides, he could not get answers to all his questions from the medium.

While at Adyar, Nalinikanta learnt from the experts of the Theosophical Society that whatever they know about soul and life after death was due to the grace of Hindu saints and yogis with whom they were in contact. On hearing this Nalinikanta developed great respect for the Hindu saints, as he did not have a good impression about them until then.

On his return from Chennai, he started looking for a knowledgeable Hindu saint who could solve his problems and shed light on life after death.

At this time, while at Kolkata, he came to know from a friend that a highly educated saint was giving discourse on various spiritual matters and answers to question of the audience. He was Swami Purnananda, once a professor of science in the Duff College of Kolkata. Nalinikanta thought that Swami Purnananda would not have chosen the path of a hermit, if he wanted to cheat people to make a living. He attended the discourse sessions of Purnananda Swami with profound interest. After a brief conversation, he realized that Purnananda Swami was genuinely knowledgeable and a class apart. Swami Purnananda advised him to find an appropriate Guru and get initiated to lead a spiritual life. He said lovingly, “You can

conquer death if you can worship the Mother of the universe and get everything you want". Nalinikanta wanted Swami Purnananda to accept him as his disciple but Swami Purnananda said that he was not his Guru and in due time, he would find his Guru. Nalinikanta returned to the place of his work with the changed attitude towards the saints of India and developed great respect for them.

Meanwhile, Nalinikanta was transferred to Kumira in Khulna district in East Bengal. After reaching his new place of work, he became a vegetarian and started every day rituals of a Brahmin. He immersed himself in thought about finding his guru and getting initiated. His belief in life after death and immortality of the soul made him believe in God. In his boyhood, he thought that it was worthless to worship in the morning and evening or to observe strict diet based on vegetarianism. But from the Theosophical Society and discussions he had with Swami Purnananda, he understood that the Hindu traditions and customs were neither worthless nor vain expressions. But it was due to lack of knowledge; we do not understand the truth hidden beneath these traditions. He understood that the ancient Hindu Rishis developed these traditions only for the welfare of the general public.

Nalinikanta became extremely eager to find his Guru. He could not find any way other than praying God with all his heart, mind and soul. In his boyhood, he thought, "The human beings have no relationship with God." Now he became totally dependent on God to find his destined Guru. His unshakable faith in God originated from the inspiration he got from his wife Sudhansubala. She was responsible for Nalinikanta's change and devotion to a pious life. Once, Nalinikanta prayed to God for his Guru with all his heart and mind till late night before falling asleep. In the middle of the night, he woke up suddenly with the vision of a saint with matted hair standing near his bed. The bedroom was illuminated with the radiance of the saint's body. Nalinikanta sat up with bewilderment. The saint extended his arm to hand over a Bael leaf and said, "My dear son! This is your mantra." Nalinikanta had the leaf in his palm. He wanted to see what was written on it. He lit a lamp and found that the leaf had one-letter mantra written on it. When he turned to the saint to ask questions about the one lettered mantra, the saint had vanished. He was dumbfounded. He thought, "I was sleeping alone with the door locked. How could the saint unlock it and get inside? Again, how did he get out of the room and left the door locked?" He understood that the saint he saw was not an ordinary saint. He must have supernatural powers. God must have sent him to be his Guru. This incident further enhanced Nalinikanta's faith in God.

He took the one lettered mantra to many scholars, learned people and saints. No one could tell him the meaning of it or how to chant it correctly. At that time, his family members wanted him to remarry. He was wearing saffron robes and looking for saints. His father remembered the astrologer's prediction. His father and other family members wanted him to marry again as soon as possible. But he refused and left for Kashi, a famous place of pilgrimage and the seat of learning in India. He hoped that in Kashi he might find someone who could tell him about this mantra and how to chant the mantra also. But to his disappointment, he could not find

anyone in Kashi to explain the inner meaning of the mantra he got and advise him the way of chanting it to get results. Thereafter, he became indifferent to worldly life.

Nalinikanta, who had always sought truth, wanted to learn about the meaning of religion, read religious books since the age of eleven years, was then, in his youthful twenties. The death of his wife changed the course of his life and he developed his interest in the life after death. Without solving that puzzle, he could not rest in peace. The divine intervention that gave him the mantra in a supernatural manner made him more determined to seek truth about the immortality of the soul. Since he found no way to know about the mantra and how to achieve what he cherished most, he was desperate and decided to commit suicide by jumping into the river Ganges. In that very night he had a dream. Lord Vishwanath, the presiding deity of Kashi, came in his dream as an old Brahmin and told, "Dear child! You are looking for a Guru. Go to Tarapith in Birbhum district of Bengal. Bamakhepa of Tarapith is your Guru." Nalinikanta, the very next morning, left for Tarapith after paying homage to Lord Vishwanath and goddess Annapurna in their temples. Nalinikanta, a non-believer in God, thus became a believer, seeking true knowledge with the grace of the Almighty.

Chapter 5

Tarapith in Bengal is famous as a place for tantric *sadhana*, i.e. for practicing tantric rituals. The goddess Tara is the principal deity and is worshipped there. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a great tantric name Bamacharan (also known as Bamakhepa) lived in this place. People in the surrounding area regarded him as a living Bhairaba of Tarapith. He attained enlightenment by worshipping goddess Tara. The common people used to call him 'Khepa' which means a mad person, because at times, he behaved like a mad man. It was believed that after receiving instruction from goddess Tara in a dream, the priests of the temple used to offer 'bhoga' (food) to Bamakhepa before offering it to Goddess. Only after he finished his meal, Devi was offered bhoga.

After receiving indications from Kashi Vishwanath in a dream in the guise of an old Brahmin, Nalinikanta came to Bamakhepa. At the first look at the mantra on the leaf, Bamakhepa realized that Goddess Tara had blessed Nalinikanta. He treated him like his own son and assured to teach him the process of chanting the mantra to reach his desired goal. On performing *sadhana* according to Bamakhepa's guidance and instruction, Nalinikanta was able to visualize the cosmic form of the Mother of the universe a night before new moon. Sitting at a specific place in the mammoth cremation ground of Tarapith in the darkness of the night, he chanted the mantra. At that time, ghosts and other mischievous spirits tried to scare him. But, Bamakhepa was present in the temple of the Goddess Tara keeping watch on his disciple. Therefore, Nalinikanta was able to continue his tantric rituals and *sadhana* without any fear and the spirits could not harm him. Towards the end of the night, while fully engrossed in chanting the mantra, Nalinikanta observed that rays of bright light emanating from his body gradually condensed to take the wonderful form of the goddess. Nalinikanta asked her, "Who are you?"

"I am the Goddess Tara, whom you have been worshipping", she vouched this three times.

Then Nalinikanta prostrated before her and being asked for a boon by the Mother, he said, "I would like to see you whenever and wherever I wish." Goddess Tara smilingly blessed him with that boon and disappeared. Nalinikanta was thrilled to visualize the cosmic mother. The proud Bamakhepa told him that whoever visualizes the Mother, was the most fortunate person and nothing remained beyond his reach in the world.

But unlike the common people, Nalinikanta could not be contended easily even after the tantric attainment. His craving for knowledge was limitless. He had received the boon to meet the Goddess any time he wished in the form of his wife Sudhansubala. This happened but when he wanted to touch her, she disappeared in his body. After a few days, he thought that "if Goddess Tara emanated from me, and also disappears in me, then who am I? What is my true identity?" He again came to Tarapith, met Bamakhepa and expressed his doubts to him. Nalinikanta asked, "It is true that Goddess Tara has all the powers in the universe but I don't understand why she

emanated from me? Bamakhepa was furious to know that Goddess Tara emanated from Nalinikanta's body. He did not give any answer, entered the temple and conferred with the Mother.

In the morning, Bamakhepa came out of the temple in a happy mood and told his disciple cheerfully, "You are destined to play a very vital role in the divine sport of the Mother. For that, you have to take sannyas from a Jnaniguru. On the path of knowledge you can know the answers to your questions, 'who am I?' and your relation with the creator and the creation."

Nalinikanta respectfully requested Bamakhepa, "Then you confer sannyas on me."

Bamakhepa replied, "No, you will have to take sannyas as per the Vedic tradition on the path of Jnana. I am a tantric saint. You go to western India. You will find your Jnaniguru there."

Nalinikanta, on the instruction of his tantric guru, took leave of him with a heavy heart. Although he was wearing saffron clothes, he was still a household person. Last time, when he returned from Bamakhepa after meeting with the cosmic mother, he was still performing his social duties. Now that Bamakhepa told him to take sannyas, he decided to renounce the household life and embrace sannyas. From Tarapith, he returned to Kutabpur and visited his father. Then he went to Radhakantapur and spent some time with his maternal aunts. He told them that he was leaving for Meherpur and left. He had already submitted his resignation from the job in Khulna. After Nalinikanta left, his father Bhubanmohan came to know from Nalinikanta's friends that his son had resigned from service. On enquiry, he came to know from the villagers that Nalinikanta would take sannyas and would not return to the family. Years back, the astrologers predicted that Nalinikanta would renounce the household life and become a famous saint. Realizing that the prediction came true, helpless Bhubanmohan kept on shedding tears in grief. He knew very well that his son was a man of sincerity and commitment. He accepted employment at an early young age in order to lessen the burden of his old father. When the same devoted son resigned from his job and left, Bhubanmohan became sure that Nalinikanta had renounced the world to embrace sannyas.

Chapter 6

After traveling through many places in the northern India, Nalinikanta reached the western part of India in search of his Jnaniguru. At that time he was leading a very difficult life. While at home he was cared for by a loving family with everyone's care lavished on him. From childhood, he was very conscious of self-respect and did not ask for anything. His mother and aunts saw to it that none of his wants remained unfulfilled. Now he was penniless. Sometimes, he spent the day without food. Hence he became very wiry and pale. He often slept at the roadside, His body and clothes were very dirty and his hair had become matted. Nalinikanta was the prime example of someone who despite his birth in a decent family with a comfortable living could take up such a life of hardship in search for truth. To meet his destined Guru and acquire true knowledge were his two prime goals. To fulfill an ideal and to achieve one's objectives if someone sacrifices all comfort and spends one's energy and time concentrating on that ideal, it is understood that he is truly determined to reach his goal and ready to give up anything to achieve it. Nalinikanta tolerated all hardships and hazards without any complaint in order to acquire knowledge. Thus almighty God provided him opportunities to fulfill his quest for truth.

Nalinikanta reached Ajmer in Rajasthan while wandering in Western India. A Bengali gentleman, knowing that Nalinikanta was also Bengali, gladly provided him shelter and food. He came to know from Nalinikanta that he was looking for a Guru, who could guide him on the path of knowledge. The host suggested the name of a Guru of the princely state of Kota. That day the Guru was to address a gathering in Ajmer. At the request of his host, Nalinikanta reached the gathering out of curiosity. He was startled to see the saint on the platform. He instantly realized that the saint who was addressing the gathering was none other than the saint who appeared in his bed room and physically handed over the one-letter mantra written on the wood apple leaf. Unexpectedly, Nalinikanta rushed towards the dais and fell at the feet of the saint shouting, "Finally I have found him!"

The learned saint was Paramahansa Srimad Swami Sachchidananda Saraswati. He was a saint from Maharashtra. Swami Sachchidananda had a hermitage sprawled over a vast area on the top of Savitri Hills at Puskar near Ajmer. Nalinikanta went with the saint to his hermitage. He began staying in that hermitage as an inmate and was engaged in various manual services. Swami Sachchidananda in the beginning was hesitant to keep Nalinikanta in his hermitage as he thought that the easy going cozy people from Bengal were generally not fit for monastic life. But though a Bengali, Nalinikanta was firm in his resolve to acquire true knowledge for which he was prepared to pay any price and undertake any hardship. He smilingly accepted the untold hardship of the monastic life and sincerely performed whatever he was directed to do by his Guru Swami Sachchidananda. The hermitage had horses and cattle. Nalinikanta brought grass for the horses, took care of the cattle, brought firewood for the holy fireplace of the hermitage, cut firewood for cooking and prepared food for Swamiji and others. However, he did not consider physical hardship difficult for him.

Subsequently, Swami Sachchidananda became extremely pleased with Nalinikanta's devotion and sincere service rendered to him and the hermitage. He initiated him into monkhood and named him 'Nigamananda'. 'Nigam' means the Vedas and 'Ananda' means divine joy. Since Nalinikanta understood the inner meaning of the Vedas very easily, his Guru named him 'Nigamananda'.

From a very tender age, Nalinikanta had several experiences of the supernatural incidents. He was born with these qualities due to his spiritual attainments in the previous births. In his ascetic life, he was able to see ghosts and divine forms with his physical eyes. Guru Swami Sachchidananda had a meat-eating demon under his control. The demon did whatever Swami Sachchidananda wanted him to do. In return Swami Sachchidananda had to offer him non-vegetarian food on every first moon day. One day Swami Nigamananda, in order to off-load the burden of his Guru, requested him to entrust the job of taking care of the demon. Ultimately, Swami Nigamananda handed over the demon to a willing Naga saint.

As required after initiation into the sainthood order, Swami Nigamananda was advised by his Guru to visit and realize the spiritual import of the four most sacred places (Dhamas) situated in the four extreme sides of India, i.e. Badrinath, Dwaraka, Rameshwaram and Puri. His sacred travel was conducted on foot. He visited all these four holy places in India and returned to the Guru's hermitage at Puskar.

A few days after his return, Guru Swami Sachchidananda ordered him to seek the shelter of a Yogiguru to practice Yoga. The reluctant Nigamananda had to leave Swami Sachchidananda and his hermitage at Puskar in search of a Yogiguru. While wondering in the deep forests of Kota, a state in Rajasthan, he met a female yogini who provided him the proper direction to his search for a Yogiguru. On her advice he left for the far eastern part of India via Kolkata by train. He arrived at Kamakshya in Assam state and from there he went on a pilgrimage with a few other saints to remote Prasurama Tirtha situated high in the mountainous range in present day Arunachal Pradesh. On the way to that place, deep inside the forest Swami Nigamananda fell seriously ill with a severe bout of dysentery. Thinking that he was not going to survive, his companions left him in that dangerous forest area at night. By the grace of God, a tribal man saw Swami Nigamananda in that helpless condition and rescued him. He provided him shelter, nursed him with loving care and gave him some herbal medicine and food. As the monsoon had already set in, it was virtually impossible for anyone to take a return journey from that hilly tract. On his recovery, Swami Nigamananda had to stay in the hamlet of that hilly tribe. Every afternoon, he made it a habit to go to the mountains and enjoy the scenic beauty of the forest and the mountains. He learnt the language of the tribe and was able to communicate with them.

One day, while wandering in the forest in the afternoon, he lost his way back to the village where he stayed. It was getting dark. Hence he was forced to spend the night by climbing into the hollow cave of the trunk of a big tree to save him from the attack of wild animals. He dozed off in spite of fear and anxiety. Towards dawn, he suddenly woke up and found the place surrounding the tree illuminated. He noticed

a saint beneath the tree who had lit a campfire under the tree. Then it became morning and he climbed down the tree and saw the saint sitting near the fire. Swami Nigamananda was amazed at the sight of the saint at that time in the dense forest. The saint seemed unconcerned and put the fire out. He hinted Swami Nigamananda to follow him and started walking. Swami Nigamananda followed him. Both of them reached a large cave at the bottom of a mountain. The saint did not utter a single word until they reached the cave. After reaching there the saint revealed that he was his Yogiguru. He was the great yogi Sumerudas. The wonder-struck Nigamananda prostrated himself on the ground to pay his deepest respect to his Yogiguru. He learnt the philosophy and practice of yoga from Swami Sumerudas staying with him there for a few months. When rainy season was over, on his Yogiguru's instruction, he left the forest, returned to the plains of India and took shelter in a rich landlord's house in the village of Haripur in the district of Pabna in East Bengal. Sumerudas told the landlord in his dream to provide the required facilities to Swami Nigamananda to enable him to practice yoga. The landlord was very happy to oblige. There Swami Nigamananda practiced yoga including 'pranayam' and 'nadisodhana' (cleaning of the nervous system). His face and body started glowing as a sure sign of his yogic activities. Since Swami Nigamananda's yogic activities were being disturbed by the flow of people seeking his blessing and guidance, he left Haripur and went to Kamakshya in Assam. While passing through Gauhati (now Guwahati) town for going to Kamakshya he was invited by Yagneshwar Biswas and he took shelter in his house. Yagneshwar Biswas was then a very senior officer in the Government. Swami Nigamananda continued his yogic practices staying in his residence and reached the state of 'Sabikalpa Samadhi' with the help of the Biswas couple. But he had a deep desire to attain 'Nirbikalpa Samadhi', the highest state in yoga. He went to a place near Bhubaneswari temple on the hilltop of Kamakshya and immersed himself in the Nirbikalpa Samadhi. He emerged from it with the sublime feeling "I am Guru". After this supreme spiritual realization he felt himself as 'Sarbabhouma Guru' (the universal preceptor).

Knowledge about any material object can be obtained in two different ways. Let us take the example of milk. Someone has not seen it. But he was told about the color, taste and benefits of drinking milk. That person has now learned about milk indirectly. But when he sees milk and tastes it, he learns about it directly. Swami Nigamananda now obtained the direct realization of the same knowledge. Yogic practices gave him the direct knowledge. He then realized that the creator and He were one and indistinguishable. The famous Upanishadic axiom 'Soham' which means God and his creation are one was experienced by Swami Nigamananda.

Chapter 7

Swami Nigamananda's body started to glow after his enlightenment. His mind was filled with untold joy. He very much wanted that all should share the realization he had. In this ecstatic mood, he remembered his Guru Swami Sachchidananda and longed to meet him at his Puskar hermitage. He left Kamakshya and traveled to Western India.

On his way, Swami Nigamananda heard that Kumbha Mela¹ was going on at Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh. He thought that his guru must have come there. So, instead of going to Puskar, he went to Kumbha mela and met his guru Swami Sachchidananda Saraswati there. The then Shankaracharya of Sringeri Math, asked him a few questions at the congregation of saints at the Kumbhamela. The Shankaracharya was very impressed and also pleased to get appropriate answers from this young sannyasi and directed Sachchidananda Swami to take away the 'danda' (a club that is carried by a person who takes up sannyas in the Shankara order) and confer on him the title of 'Paramahansa', the highest designation for a saint in the Hindu world. He declared him a muktapurusha, which means a person who is free from all attachments of the material world. Henceforward, Swami Nigamananda became known as Paramahansa Paribrajacharya Srimad Swami Nigamananda Saraswatidev. Guru Swami Sachchidananda also bestowed the responsibility of being a Guru on this worthy disciple, thus enthroning him in the seat of Guru.

On his way he reached Kashi, an important holy place for the Hindus. People at Kashi worship mother Annapurna, the goddess of affluence. At that time, there was a famine in Kashi. Swami Nigamananda was a Vedantic saint who had attained supreme knowledge. He did not believe in the different forms of gods and goddesses. The supreme God whom people pray is the formless Brahman. He blesses all by imparting knowledge but ignorant people worship him in different forms and names just for their self-interest. These gods and goddesses with different names and forms emerge from ignorance. Now witnessing the famine in Kashi, he could not have faith in mother Annapurna. Swami Nigamananda heard that no newcomer to Kashi suffers from starvation. Mother Annapurna herself makes arrangement for the food for all such visitors. In order to test the veracity of this saying, he sat in the Dashashwamedha Ghat on the bank of the river Ganges and remained absorbed in meditation without eating anything. He decided unless mother Annapurna herself bought him food he would not eat anything at all.

Gradually, twilight deepened to evening. An old lady approached Swami Nigamananda and asked him to take care of a packet she carried and then went to have a bath in the river Ganges. Swami Nigamananda did not know what was in the

¹ The sequence of two events in this chapter namely Swami Nigamananda going to Kumbhamela and reaching Kashi has been reversed from the original text since the sequence of events in this book closely matches with an essay written by Swami Nigamanada within a few years of these events.

packet After a while he was absorbed in meditation and went into the state of 'Samadhi' (deep meditation). When he emerged from meditation, he realized that it was about 10 o'clock in the night. He noticed that the packet left by the old lady was still lying there. "Hasn't the old lady finished her bath yet?" he wondered. Out of curiosity, he opened the pack. There were eight pieces of fresh sitabhog (a type of delicious sweet) in it. Sitabhoga is usually available in Burdwan, a far away place situated in Bengal and not in Kashi. His heart became filled with devotion when he unexpectedly received such delicious food after the whole day's fasting. He consumed the sweets, drank some water and then went to sleep on an open verandah of an abandoned old house.

In his dream that night, he visualized Goddess Annapurna in all her glory to him, "Why don't you believe in my existence? Didn't you realize that I am the one who offered you that food in the guise of an old lady?" Being asked, she revealed her identity, "I am Goddess Annapurna."

Swami Nigamananda replied, "I have realized the formless Brahman, the epitome of the supreme knowledge. I have understood 'Who I am'. The philosophy regarding the supreme God is that God is beyond any name and form. Therefore, I have no faith in the gods and goddesses."

Mother Annapurna admonished him affectionately and told, "Your knowledge is incomplete." The supreme God is almighty. It is true that He is nameless and formless; it is also true that He can assume various names and forms since he is almighty. Unless both of these qualities are with God, he would not be called the Absolute and Almighty Brahman. Absolute means everything is within Him. You have attained siddhi (fulfillment) through the path of knowledge and yoga but have not followed the path of devotion. Consequently, your impression that you have acquired complete knowledge is incorrect. It is true that you have acquired the knowledge of Brahman but you are unaware of 'Abara Brahman' (that God is present in all things even in the meanest of the objects)." Saying this Goddess Annapurna appeared before Swami Nigamananda in her true form with full glory. The pride of a Brahmajnani (the knower of Brahman) Swami Nigamananda was shattered into pieces. He very much wanted to know the path of devotion and the other aspect of Brahma. He then remembered Gouri Maa. While Swami Nigamananda, after initiation into Sannyas order, was traveling with his guru Swami Sachchidananda as a paribrajaka (traveling ascetic) to Badrinath, high above the Himalaya range, he had come across this female yogi, Gouri Maa in her hermitage. At that time, she told Swami Sachchidananda, "If your young disciple attains Nirbikalpa Samadhi, you send him to me." She attained supreme realization through the path of prema (divine love) and was able to accomplish extraordinary power through yoga. The restless Nigamananda thought of her. Without delay he left Kashi and went towards the hermitage of Gouri Maa on the Himalayas.

After days of walking he reached the hermitage of Gouri Maa. When he met Gouri Maa, she received Swami Nigamananda cordially and arranged for his stay there. In course of discussions, she reminded him of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. She told, "Sri

Chaitanya also received sannyas as per the vedic order. He was an incarnation of God. He obviously had the supreme knowledge but he preached his disciples the path of 'Premabhakti' (divine love and devotion). Just as a mother loves her child, a friend defends his friend, and a compassionate master looks after his servant, God loves and looks after everyone in the same way. So every human being should love God as the closest kin of all. It is the prime duty of everyone to lead life filled with such type of love for God. God has created this universe so that people will love Him in this manner and hence has given them the knowledge and power to be the best of all His creations. Although He is beyond any name and form, He has assumed various forms of gods and goddesses to receive the worship and love of the devotees. One should love one's own Istadeva i.e. the form of God one worships.. Through the sadhana of 'Premabhakti", utmost fulfillment of life can be attained. Saying this, Gouri Maa instilled love and devotion in Swami Nigamananda by touching him.

On receiving Gouri Maa's advice Swami Nigamananda, who had attained fulfillment in tantra, gyana, and yoga, remained absorbed in the love of God. He could understand that God has been trying to bless human beings with the transmissions of love and devotion. God is happy when one attains siddhi (spiritual perfection). He becomes happier than the seeker who attains the highest place of the devotional world. God has taken away Nalinikanta's mother in his childhood, taken away his wife in his youth and after that appeared as the astral image of his departed wife to motivate him for jnana sadhana. Therefore, only god is the well-wisher of all human beings. There is no nearest and dearest as He is. After realizing this, Swami Nigamananda was filled with humble devotion. He had read in school,

***In your good times you are dear to everybody,
Unfortunately no one comes to you in your tragedy.
Good times or bad times, God is there with you always.
He is the only true friend, mind this knowledge.***

In good times or bad times, God remains with every human being. He is the loveable and dependable friend of us. Now those teachings of his childhood came true in his life. When he was eager to have the mantra, God offered him the mantra in the form and appearance of Swami Sachchidananda. When he failed to find his Guru after a long and painful search and resolved to commit suicide, the same God appeared in his dream and provided information about Bamakhapa. During the period of sadhana, God not only protected him in various adverse situations, He also helped him as his close associate. Again, the same God trained him in various sadhanas and continued guiding him even after Nirbikalpa Samadhi. He appeared before him as mother Annapurna and initiated him to the path of divine love. The more Swami Nigamananda thought about it, the more his heart became filled with gratitude and pure devotion towards Him. After this attainment and new experience, he returned to Guwahati.

Goddess Tara was his Istadevi. At that time God again appeared before him as his Istadevi and said, "In your last life you had a longing to get me as your wife. In this life that ambition of yours will be fulfilled. I am Kalpataru, the tree that fills all desires. From now on, I will love and serve you just like your virtuous wife Sudhansubala. You will think yourself as Lord Shiva, the husband of Mahashakti. Shiva, the universal Guru, is the husband of Mahashakti. By the same token, you are also Shiva. You are the universal Guru. Each individual in this world is your child. You go back to the society as Guru and help people in attaining salvation through the realization of their true self and identity. Provide the knowledge of self to the ignorant people. The scriptures state that God is the universal Guru."

When the mother of the universe asked him to accept the responsibility of Guru and assured him that she would serve him as his consort, Swami Nigamananda realized he had become complete. In spiritual attainment, ultimately the wish of God prevails. Therefore, he accepted the responsibility of Guru and returned to society. Thus Paribrajaka Swami Nigamananda became Sadguru Nigamananda. He made a contract with the Cosmic Mother that those who will remain as his disciples for life would attain salvation in one life and those who become his disciples and then go against him and take shelter of other Gurus will attain salvation in three lives.

Chapter 8

Swami Nigamananda left Garo Hills where he spent time with the Divine Mother who lived with him as his wife Sudhansubala. While at Garo Hills hermitage, he had written his first book 'Yogiguru'. He came to society and started writing his other books to spread Sanatan Dharma as the non-sectarian all time religion. He became famous for his five books: Yogiguru, Jnaniguru, Tantrikguru, Premikaguru and Brahmacharya Sadhana.

Brahmacharya or celibacy is the first step in building the life of a sadhaka (spiritual practitioner). His book Brahmacharya Sadhana has elaborate advice on how boys and girls can lead a regulated and pious life, keep their body, mind and soul pure and have high moral values. When he was young, Swami Nigamananda lived in the society like every other boy. He had good moral character and always stood for what was right. The moral and humanistic values which he never abandoned, made him exemplary and unique. Building good moral character is the foundation of spiritual life in every religion. Hence 'Brahmacharya Sadhana' is a must for one and all. Many educated people read these five books and became his disciples.

Swami Nigamananda started publishing a monthly religious magazine named 'Aryadarpana' from the year 1908 A.D. The core beliefs and philosophy of Sanatan Dharma were the contents of this spiritual monthly magazine.

Shankaracharya, the eminent philosopher and preacher of Sanatan Dharma, said that the main aim of everybody's life is to attain freedom from the shackles of *maya* (illusion) and dedicate one's life for the betterment of the world leading virtuous life. Swami Nigamananda attained that state in his life. Hence in the next phase of his life, his aim was to work for the welfare of society as a whole. He noticed that in order to build a world full of people with strong moral values and character, it is necessary to teach proper education and practice selfless service to human kind. In order to spread true education and serve the poor and the downtrodden as a personification of God, he opened ashrams in East and West Bengal. Several well-educated people were inspired by his ideals and got initiated to sannyas in these ashrams. Many young people also took initiation to become brahmacharis to lead spiritual life on his lines and devote them to service to God and humanity. In the main hermitage in Assam, he opened two branches called 'Sri Gouranga Seva Niketan' and 'Rishi Vidyalaya' to materialize his ideals into action. Sri Gouranga Seva Niketan was devoted to serve humankind and Rishi Vidyalaya to spread right education.

In the month of Pausa (January) of the Bengali year 1318 (1911 A.D.) the foundation stone of Saraswat Math and Sri Gouranga Seva Niketan was laid. Swami Nigamananda justifiably called this math as 'Shanti Ashram' (the abode of peace). Later this became famous as the Saraswat Math. Later the Math in Kokilamukh, in Assam was known as 'Assam Bangiya Saraswat Math'. Other ashrams were branches of this central body. In the then Bengal, he established five ashrams to

propagate Sanatan dharma and offer service to humankind. Of these ashrams, 3 are in present Bangladesh and now extinct.

The spiritual perfection is attained when one visualizes the presence of God in everything. In true sense, the service to humankind is service to God. He himself was established in this truth and He used to love human beings, plants and animals as God-incarnate. His letters, advice to his devotees and disciples bear the evidence of his love for all. Below is an extract from one of his letters written by him to a disciple,

“Fill your heart with love and devotion. Build your character and lead a disciplined life in accordance with the advice from your *guru*. Embrace every human being in the world as your brother and sister. Take care of the diseased. Give solace to the distressed. Wipe out the tears of the destitute. Shower love from the bottom of your heart, on the people who are miserable, distressed and troubled. Don't hate the sinners. Wash away their sins with your water of love. Drive out the demonic selfish attitude from your heart and fill it up with love for God instead. This is real virtue and religion. Otherwise, you won't be able to get God's grace no matter how long you meditate with your eyes closed and senses controlled. This is worshipping the inanimate. One who is not kind to His creation, how can one get favors from the Creator? One who has not learned to forgive others is not eligible to be forgiven by God. One who is not able to love everyone in the universe cannot love God. One must not dwell in fool's paradise.”

(Sri Sri Thakur's letters – Part I. Letter No. 102).

The above sentences depict a very small portion of Swami Nigamananda's ideology. He has spread these ideals and messages to mankind through his books, various discourses, and letters to his disciples and through his devotees throughout the world.

Chapter 9

When Swami Nigamananda returned to the society as a guru, there was manifested in him the uncommon yogic powers and radiance in the fullest scale. The then leading newspapers and periodicals of Bengal published and propagated the splendid spiritual powers of this young sannyasi and guru. He could easily cure chronic and fatal diseases like colic and extinguish burning houses. In some cases he could bring the dead back to life. But in the last part of his life, he stopped such manifestations of yogic power and lived as a 'Sahaja Manushya' (normal man) to work and pray for the welfare of the people of the world.

Therefore, the common people could not know from his external behavior that he was a great saint with the unparalleled yogic attainments and spiritual powers. He spent the last fourteen years of his life in seclusion in Purusottam Dham i.e. Puri in Orissa.

There was a unique and perfect blend of knowledge and devotion in the life of Sadguru Swami Nigamananda. His books are full with universal and harmonious spiritual matters and principles. His sermons and gospels express the essence of all religions. In the present age, the words of religious harmony were first heard from Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Swami Nigamananda Saraswati strongly supported his words with evidences from the scriptures. Thus, he firmly established the foundation of religious harmony.

Purusottamdham or Puri of Orissa is glorified by upholding the principles of Jnana of Acharya Shankara and Prema of Sri Gourangadev. This dham (Spiritual Center) is the place of union of knowledge and love or devotion. That is why Paramahansa Swami Nigamananda Saraswati Dev selected this place as his last and final abode. He has expressed his spiritual ideology in a nutshell as the union of Acharya Shankara's Jnana (knowledge) and Sri Gouranga's Prema (love). It means that the attainment of the ultimate knowledge on the path of devotion should be the final goal of everyone. The scriptures relating to Bhakti (devotion) mention about the liking for 'Nama' (Name of the object of worship) and compassion for creatures. Swami Nigamananda has also advised to take recourse to sincere devotion for God and give service to all people and creatures thinking them as the manifestation of God. Everybody should strive for the company of the saints and noble people and serve with all sincerity. This is very helpful leading to one's spiritual growth. If such company is not available, the reading of religious books and recitation of Nama given by one's Guru also amount to company of saints. All can know these things and the essence of religions by reading the monumental books written by Swami Nigamananda.

While staying at Puri, Swami Nigamananda bought a house named 'Nilachal Kutir' in Swarga Dwara area beside the road leading to Gobardhan Math. From there he was very glad to see the blue and smiling waves of the sea, the Bay of Bengal and also the temple of Sri Jagannath. Although he was a Vedantic Sannyasi, he attained perfection in Jnana and Prema. So Sri Jagannath, the image of Brahma, was dear to

him. He gladly enjoyed Mahaprasad (the food offered to Sri Jagannath) and also directed his disciples and devotees to accept and take it joyfully. He had tremendous attraction to this Dham during his journey to different holy places in India. Towards the last part of his life he entrusted the management of his main monastery in Assam and hermitages in different places to the trustees as per the provisions of a 'Trust Deed' approved by him and began to stay in a detached manner in solitude at Puri. While at Puri, he lived like an unassuming, simple common man without showing any sign of a great saint.

In the year 1934, on the sacred day of Jhulana Purnima, i.e. the full moon day of the month of Sravan, which is also his birthday, he established the Nilachal Saraswat Sangha taking the then disciples of Orissa as its primary members and directed them to spread his teachings and ideology. He also told them to lead an ideal household life, form Sanghas and exchange spiritual experiences among them.

On the 29th November 1935, he left his mortal body at 1:15 pm at Kolkata.

He did not transfer his power of Guru to any of his disciples or devotees. Before he left his mortal body, he emphatically told an ardent disciple that he remained Guru as before and he would guide his devotees and disciples as he was doing when he was alive. He thus remained Guru for all time.

India is a country of many religions and abodes of gods and sages. God has been incarnated in this country time and time again to purify life and religion in society. Every dust particle of India is made holy by the sacred touch of the feet of the innumerable sages and saints. Sadguru Nigamananda is one of them. His speciality lies in his universal spiritual message and non-sectarian propagation of the religion of truth. There is no place for any orthodox teachings and ideology.

His specialty also lies in his ultimate spiritual attainments in four important areas of yoga, tantra, jnana and prema. Thus, he has become 'Sarbabhouma Guru' (The Universal Master). He has advised his disciples and devotees just to love him a little and there is no need of any arduous exercise for spiritual progress in life. Faith and love for ones own Guru will endow one with the ultimate spiritual attainment. Swami Nigamananda, in order to firmly establish this truth in society, spread the 'mahamantra' - 'Jayaguru'. He has advised all his disciples and devotees to recite and chant this mantra to get their 'Ista' (the god or guru they want to have in life). He can be both 'Ista' and 'Guru' for one if one so desires.

Thus he is the means and he is the end. He has promised to all his disciples and devotees that he would take care of all their responsibilities in the spiritual world. But his disciples, as devotees have to build their life and mould their character as per his teachings and also spread his ideology in the world. His immortal advice and words have awakened a new spiritual upheaval in the life of many in this world, in those who have embraced Him and His teachings.

Chapter 10

Swami Nigamananda had chosen to live in solitude in Nilachal Kutir, Puri, Odisha detached from the day-to-day affairs of his Matha and Ashram. However, he could not keep himself unnoticed for long at Puri, just as the sun cannot hide behind the clouds forever. Slowly a number of truth-seekers discovered him at Puri and became his disciples and devotees. Some of those were then high school students. They visited Swami Nigamananda at Nilachal Kutir almost on a daily basis, out of high regards for him and listen to his inspiring and heart touching advice and discourses.

On the 24th of August, 1934 AD, on receiving a divine urge, Swami Nigamananda founded an association for his devotees and disciples of Odisha and named it as 'Nilachala Saraswata Sangha'. It was the auspicious day of Jhulana Purnima, the full moon day of the month of Shravan as per Indian Calendar and his birthday. Some of the above mentioned devotees gathered in Nilachal Kutir to celebrate his birthday and tendered their homage by worshiping and offering him prayers. Since they didn't know the process and sequence of the prayer and also of the worship, a lot of mistakes were committed. Observing these mistakes, Swami Nigamananda told them gravely, "I want to tell you a few things today. After leaving the Maths and Ashrams, I have been resting here in solitude for last twelve years. Then you all came and gradually your number increased. Observing this, today I experience a divine inspiration. Take this as my first directive. All of you must try to lead a disciplined and idealistic life. Shun childishness and if you want to take shelter in me, try to live by my ideals wholeheartedly."

He further advised them that day, "If anybody wants to deliver a lecture or act in a play, he first need to rehearse. You, in order to perform the rehearsal, keep the bigraha (an image or photo) of your guru in your house. Worship the bigraha according to your local traditions. Offer prayers and try to comprehend the meanings of those prayers."

"All of you should gather at a place on a specific day in a week to offer Aarati (a form of worship), offer prayer and read 'Aryadarpan' (a spiritual magazine founded by Swami Nigamananda and mouth-piece of Sanatana Dharma) before the bigraha of Sri Sri Gurudev. There, you should discuss my teachings. At the end of the discussions, the devotee who wants to host the next session should invite everyone to his house. It may be difficult to host the weekly session in everyone's house till every one of you are financially independent. In that case, one of you who has the facility can host the sessions. Setup a fund for the service of the poor and the destitute. Each of you must make some contribution knowing well that the poor and the destitute are God-incarnate. Such action will purify your mind. Meditation, chanting and prayer are not the only ways to purify your mind. Service to living beings also achieves the same results."

"It may be convenient to conduct the spiritual sessions on Sundays. At that time, you must carry out discussions on spiritual matters only. There are different

organizations for different purposes. Some organizations aim at political gains, some try for social renovation. Your organization's only goal is to attain spiritual advancement of its members. In this manner, you have to establish the power of unity. Furthermore, you then attend the spiritual sessions of nearby sangha and attend sammilanis in order to gain inspirations for this union."

"My second directive is that you should lead an ideal household life. My household devotees are spiritually more developed than others. When you lead a spiritual life, your children will follow you to become of noble character. Then the great saints like Vyasa, Vasistha, Jaimini and Patanjali will be born in your family. Hence you should lead an ideal household life."

"My third directive is that you share your spiritual experiences with one another. No devotee should keep anything secret from others. Always live a simple and truthful life."

From the directive above, it is clear that Swami Nigamananda formed this organization with a divine inspiration. He also organized the Nilachala Saraswata Sangha differently than that of the sanghas formed elsewhere.

He registered a trust deed in 1930 AD for smooth functioning of the Math and Ashrams established by him. However, he did not include Nilachal Kutir at Puri as a property of the Matha and Nilachal Saraswat Sangha as a sangha under Saraswat Math. Upon foundation of this Sangha, he became the founding president of the Sangha which he has not done with any other organization that he established elsewhere. As evidenced in the 7th issue of 18th year of Aryadarpan, i.e. Magha issue of 13451 Sal of the Bengali era, Shri Banamali Dash, upon the directive of the founder president of Nilachala Saraswata Sangha, Sri Sri Thakura, asked all the disciples and devotees from the state of Odisha to send their names and addresses to him for the purposes of uniting under the banners of Nilachala Saraswata Sangha.

The members of Nilachala Saraswata Sangha follow those three directives of Swami Nigamananda in letter and spirit. In the process, they accept Him as their only Guru and Ista. In doing so, the members accept their Guru as the means as well as the end of the God-realization; contrary to the prevailing belief of Guru being the means to the end of God-realization. This is a concept that Swami Nigamananda introduced at the later part of his physical presence.

The headquarters of Nilachal Saraswat Sangha is called Shri Shri Nigamananda Smirti Mandir, is located in Puri, Odisha, India near the sea beach of the Bay of Bengal in Swargadwar area. It is located just across the road in front of Nilachal Kutir, which is the house where Swami Nigamananda spent 12 years of last part of his life and where Nilachala Saraswata Sangha was born. It is considered as his eternal abode where he continues to live all the time after leaving his mortal body.

At the beginning, the Sangha was a very small entity largely consisting of high school students and few elders. Subsequently, Shri Banamali Dash, a famous lawyer

in Puri at that time, became the president and Shri Durgacharan Mohanty became the secretary of Nilachal Saraswat Sangha who played a pivotal role in the growth of the organization.

The Sangha has published many religious books to spread the principles and philosophies of Swami Nigamananda. Most of the books are published in Oriya language with a few books in Hindi, English and Bengali languages. The Sangha also publishes a quarterly spiritual magazine in Oriya language named "Sangha Sevak" as its mouthpiece.

The Nilachala Saraswata Sangha is a registered religious society, registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860 of India. Its Registration number is 7391/390 of 1973-74. It has a bye-law of its own which governs the functioning of its religious society.

The Sangha has a female wing for the female devotees of Shri Shri Thakur Nigamananda named "Nilachala Saraswata Mahila Sangha". At the branch (Shakha Sangha) level, there are also female wings which are called 'Mahila Sanghas' which function under the control of the branch Sangha. Many branches of the Nilachala Saraswata Sangha have now wings for the male devotees called 'Sevak Sanghas'. There are also separate wings at some of its branches for the kumaris (unmarried girls) for separate worship and learning by them called 'Kumari Sangha' under the control of the branch Sangha. Some branches have 'Pathachakras' which are units of smaller group of devotees at a suitable convenient location for joint worship with emphasis on study of books published by Nilachala Saraswata Sangha. The Sangha has approved family worship centers at the houses of member-devotees which are called 'Gruhasana' with an image of Guru at the family level, where Shri Gurudev is considered not only as a member of the family but its head. Such Gruhasans help a devotee for his own spiritual practices on a daily basis.

The Sangha issues annual identity cards to its members containing the text of daily prayers before the Guru in Gruhasans and some dos and don'ts. The Sangha believes in the eternal existence of Shri Guru, Swami Nigamananda Saraswati. Each member of the Sangha accepts Swami Nigamananda Saraswati as his only Guru and Ista (the desired deity to be worshiped) and gives affirmation to the Sangha that he or she be fully guided by the direction of the Sangha. As per the By-law of the Sangha, only household devotees of Swami Nigamananda Saraswati can become a member.

The Sangha organizes an annual conference of its devotees at various places in Odisha and selected places outside Odisha around Magha Purnima of Indian Calendar which provides a forum for meeting of all devotees both male and female belonging to the sangha to worship the Guru collectively, exchange ideas and share spiritual experiences among them. This annual conference is called Utkal Pradeshik Bhakta Sammilani in which discussions are held on ideal household life, matters relating to the Sangha and Bhaba Binimaya (sharing of spiritual experiences among the devotees).

The Sangha which had a humble beginning in the year 1934 AD has grown in size, strength and structure over the years due to the grace of Shri Guru and is now an important religious organization of India.

The Nilachala Saraswata Sangha, with its membership in several thousands, recently completed 75 years and celebrated its Platinum Jubilee. Since its inception in 1934 AD, the Sangha has been steadfastly growing and propagating Swami Nigamananda's teachings and philosophy, not only within Orissa, but also in many other states in India and abroad. As of now, the Nilachala Saraswata Sangha has grown to have more than 160 branches in different parts of Odisha. New branches have also been established beyond Odisha, including one each in New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai, Jamshedpur, Pune, Bangalore and Hyderabad. Moving beyond the boundary of India, a branch of the Nilachala Saraswata Sangha has also been established in United States of America which has its members living in various parts of the USA and also in the United Kingdom.