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Performance of Gorakhnath: Revitalizing Its Significance and Vibrancy within the Nath Community

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Abstract

Gorakhnath was the influential founder of the Nath Hindu Monastic movement in India. He is one of the two notable disciples of Minanath, the founder of the Natha Sampradaya. It is believed that he has received teachings from Shiva. Gorakhnath championed yoga and an ethical life of self-determination to reaching samadhi. He is considered a Maha-yogi in the Hindu tradition. Historical texts imply that Gorakhnath was originally a Buddhist in a region influenced by Shaivism, and he converted to Hinduism, championing Shiva, and Yoga. The hagiography on Gorakhnath describes him as having appeared on earth several times. North Indian hagiographies suggest he originated from northwest India. Other hagiographies on Gorakhnath in Bengal and Bihar suggest he originated from the eastern region of India (Assam). Though there is no specific timespan of his birth, but believed that his presence was around the 8th century. In the eastern region of India, there is a creed that Gorakhnath is the saviour God of cows. In some parts of Assam, Bangladesh and Cooch Behar, there is a ritual to worship Gorakhnath for every newborn calf. Specifically, the Nath Sampradaya of the above mentioned are regions worships Gorakhnath on the 21st day of the newborn calf. They offer 'kheer' to the God prepared from the milk of a mother cow as an oblation to the God. In the time of worshipping, a group of people perform several songs which have been orally transmitted from generation to generation. These songs liven up the magnificence of and the tales of his Guru Gorakhnath's appearance as a cow protector. In the present days, this ritual and these tales have been found in amalgamation with the Rajbangsi Culture.

Keywords: Gorakhnath, Nath, ritual, Yoga, Cow, song, worship

Gorakhnath, also called Gorakhshanatha, was a Hindu master yogi who was the influential founder of the Nath Hindu Monastic movement in India. He is one of the two notable disciples of Minanath or Matsyendranath, the founder of the Nath sampradaya. The incarnation of Gorakhnath was between the fifth century A.D and the twelfth century A.D. Gorakhnath was not only a 'Maha-yogi' and a significant evangelist, but also a sagacious and litterateur. Treatises on Guru Parampara in the Nath Sampradaya dictate that he is one of the nine influential Nathas. It means he is one of the most notable gurus of the nine principal gurus. He is considered a Maha Yogi in the Hindu tradition. Historical texts imply

that Gorakhnath was originally a Buddhist in a region that was influenced by Shaivism, and he converted to Hinduism, championing Shiva and Yoga. Gorakhnath championed yoga and the ethical life of self-determination as a means to reaching Samadhi.

Scholars like Minanatha and Gorakhnath are eminent ascetic persons in the Nath sampradaya. The title 'nath' was added to the yogis of this sampradaya after initiation. The lexical meaning of the word 'nath' is God, the Almighty, and preceptor. Besides, 'nath' defines just a community of human beings. This community has maintained its existence from the very ancient period through its elevated lifestyle. Besides India, Nepal and Tibet are also their domiciles. They contemplate or pursue 'Param Iswar' [God] in the form of Nath, and the persons who receive success in their contemplation turn into Godlike gurus among the common people. In the course of time, the word 'nath' has been treated as their principal title. These meditators and their inheritors have been familiarized in this universe as Nath. It has been dictated in the *Brahma Vaivarta Purana* that the first and foremost of the eleventh Rudras was Mahan Rudra, and the name of his wife is Kala or Kalabati. The name of their son is Bindunatha. According to scholars, Mahayogi Bindunatha gave birth to 'nath', and from then, the word 'nath' has become a convention. The other name of Bindunath is Yoganath. Every person from the Nath lineage uses the word Nath at the very end of their names, such as Adinath, Minanath, Gorakhnath, Chowranginath, Jalandharnath, Satyanath, Chhayannath and so on.

Nath is the Guru of this Nath Sampradaya. They meditate on 'paramguru' in the advice of nathguru. For being generated from Bindunath, the title 'nath' has been inscribed after the name of yogis. As they practice yoga, they are also referred to as 'yogis'. Many of the ancestors of the present Nath sampradaya achieved success in their pursuit of yoga, and many of them have been worshipped by the common people as incarnations even during their lifetimes. Some of them attained more popularity in comparison with the Gods. Common people worshipped the three Naths - Adinath, Minanath and Gorakhnath. The worship of TinNath was extensively practised in the convention. There was a belief among the common folk that by worshipping the TinNath, people would get rid of suffering, repentance, poverty, and that their longings would be fulfilled. They worship to bring prosperity and peace to their domestic life.

'Yogikul' is another name for the Nath sampradaya. The principal work of these people was following yoga along with studying, teaching and beneficence. The nath saints brought a smile to the exhausted, rudderless and aimless people, showing them the virtue of living, the ways of salvation. They uprooted the walls of social discrimination and gave equal dignity to every person irrespective of race and colour. The Nath sampradaya is the community of ancient India that holds the lofty ideas in different fields and has an elevated culture. This community is the tangible democrat, free from fundamentalism and bountiful in nature. They re-established and enlarged the Sanatan Hindu religion in India and Nepal by saving it from the aggression of Jainism and Buddhism. In the Satya Yuga, there was no racism. Everyone was kinder at that time. So, there is no doubt that the Nath sampradaya generated from Rudra is gracious in nature. They worship the master of this earth as Nath, and for this reason, this religion is called the Nath religion. It can be said that they addressed their guru as nath, and through the help of the nath, they meditate on the 'paramguru' or 'parameswar'. The nath followers are the pursuers of the *Rudra* form of Mahadeva. In this context, it is very clear that they are 'shaiva'.

Many scholars dictate that the Nath religion originated in Bangladesh. As a result of it, scholars have mentioned a Bengali book named "Nathasahitya". In the literature of Bengali as well as in the "Nathasahitya", the names of the four gurus have been referred to. They are Minanath or Matsyendranath and his disciple Gorakhnath, Jalandharipa or Haripa Sidhyacharya and Kanupa Bondha or Kanupa Sidhyacharya. In chronicles, a relationship between them and the king of East Bengal, Manik Chandra, is described. The names of the Queen Moynamoti and their son Gopichandra or Gobinda Chandra are also mentioned.

The predominance of Nathyogis was especially in Bangladesh. Dr. Mohan Singh has referred in his book about Gorakhnath that he was the inhabitant of 'Purba Banga'. Gorakhnath had no parentage. It has been seen that at different times, Gorakhnath appeared in different places. For this, people believe that there are four incarnations of Gorakhnath in the Krita, Treta, Dvapara and Kali Yuga. The reality is that Gorakhnath was alive for ages by virtue of his yoga. He was the figure of Mahadev's sacrifice. Sometimes, it is dictated that Mahadev himself appeared in the form of Gorakhnath to pay a visit to Goddess Parvati. There is a saga narrating the birth of Gorakhnath. One day, Mahayogi Minanath takes alms from a woman. To see Minanath as a powerful saint, the woman prays for a son. Minanath gives her some ash kindly and states that in the appropriate moment, she will obtain a son. The woman keeps the ashes apart in order to consume them later. Then the neighbour women mock her after hearing all the incidents. At this, being irritated, the woman throws the ashes into a dung heap.

After twelve long years, Minanath again comes to take alms from the woman and inquiries about the son. Then he comes to know that the woman throws the ashes into a dung heap. After that, he goes near the dung heap and invokes the son to come out. A twelve-year princely boy comes out from the heap and stands in front of Minanath with his folded hands. As he emerges from dung [goraksha], his name becomes Goraksha. Minanath sets out with Goraksha, and after giving the initiation of sannyas dharma, he takes Goraksha to Badrikashram. There, Goraksha achieved his salvation after twelve years of pursuit. Then he becomes Gorakshnath or Gorakhnath and starts his pilgrimage with his Guru. Gorakhnath has perambulated many places and pursued his pursuit. He has visited various countries and preached his religion by establishing monasteries, mandirs and idols. Thus, he initiated a great number of disciples and evangelized.

The lexical meaning of the word 'yoga' is connectivity. It defines the connection between 'paramatma' and 'jibatma'. The union or amalgamation is the principal work of yogadharma. Devadidev Mahadev is the reservoir of all knowledge, omniscient and 'trikaladarshi'. Lord Shiva is the creator of this Yogadharma, or the pursuit of Yoga. He has dictated this yoga to Parvati, and at that moment, Minanath learned this. After some time, he teaches this to his main disciple, Gorakhnath, and Gorakhnath has spread among his disciples. In this way, this great pathway of pursuit is spread all over India and outside India. Yoga Darshan is a very ancient Darshan. Whatever we perceive with our material eyes is not the real image; the real 'darshan' is to perceive with the help of our inner sight. Yoga teaches us to have this real 'darshan' or to see the union of 'atma' and 'paramatma'. Through 'Yogadarshan', one can comprehend the truth of the self, and thus one can achieve the 'Brahma darshan'. Through practicing yoga, real knowledge originates in the mind of the follower. Achieving this knowledge is called 'Brahmalabh'. In this way, the soul of the follower attains salvation.

Gorakhnath dictates the six parts of yoga – asana, pranayama, pratyahar, dharaṇa, dhyāna and samādhi. The follower who attains the knowledge of Brahma is called a nath. A nath dictates a path among his disciples. Similarly, the disciples can also turn into a nath by maintaining all the advice of their nathguru. Among nathgurus, the nine naths became renowned in Bangladesh. Besides, TinNath has become very popular. They are Adinath, Minanath, and Gorakhnath. It was believed that meditating on the names of the Tinnath would protect people from every danger and burden. That is why there is a line “saradin koiro re bhai songsarer kam, sondhya hoite loio Tinnather nam” [Do all the works of livelihood throughout the daytime, but from evening meditate on the name of Tinnath].

According to Dr. Grierson, Gorakhnath was a man of the eighth century. Some say, the birthplace of Gorakhnath was in Punjab, now Gorakhpur or Kathiawad. According to the Nepalese, Gorakhnath was engrossed in his devotion to Lord Shiva in a cave in West Nepal. It is said that Gorakhnath is the Adiguru of the Gorkha race. To some scholars, the name ‘gorkha’ is derived from the name of Gorakhnath. For this, Gorakhnath is the honourable God of the race of Gorkha and for the people of Nepal. Gorakhnath is considered the founder of *Hatha Yoga*. The nath yogi sannyasis who follow Gorakhnath - are called Kanphata Yogis. After initiation, the ears of these yogis have been pierced. In these two holes of the ears, they have to wear ‘kundals’. The ‘kundal’ is made of stone, crystal or the horns of rhinoceroses. They believe that this kundal is the kundal of Lord Shiva. Yogis call it ‘mudra’, and another name for it is ‘darshan’. So, the kanphata yogis are also called as ‘darshan yogis’. The influence of Kanphata yogis is mainly noticed in the region of the Himalaya.

It is believed that Guru Gorakhnath saves people and cows from any kind of crucial situation. If anyone recalls Gorakhnath to save cows or to protect cows from other animals or from any disease, it is said that he appears to protect and save cows. He is the guardian angel of cows. In the ancient period, when cows were not tied down with ropes, common people domesticated cows with a deep belief in Guru Gorakhnath. There were many legendary tales where Gorakhnath returned the deviated cows to their masters, and some people experienced that Gorakhnath roamed in the deep forests sitting on the back of a cow. The cow is the ‘vahana’ of God Gorakhnath. For this, the idol of Gorakhnath has a statue of a cow beside him.

Gorakhnath had the capability to heal cows from any kind of severe disease. Tinnath is worshipped unitedly, where Gorakhnath is a part. The idol of Tinnath is all about a single body that bears three heads. People believe that the Tinnath is the three different forms of absolute power. For having three heads, during worship, the devotees offer three oblations differently. As Gorakhnath is inferred as the incarnation of “Devadidev Mahadev”, there is a similarity in the process of worshipping. When Gorakhnath is invoked separately, only one oblation is dedicated. Nath Yogis carry a begging bowl, a wallet, fire tongs and use a crutch [acal]. All of these are perceived in the image of Gorakhnath. The wallet is made of red cloth, and it is usually hung from the left shoulder. He wore a rudraksha mala and a langoti [a special rope made of black sheep’s wool].

Gorakhnath or Tinnath is invoked for the well-being of a newborn calf. This ritual has been spread over the other communities also, exceeding the Nath community. When the age of the newborn calf becomes twenty-one days, this ritual of Gorakhnath is performed. The women of the house don't drink the milk of the particular cow for whom the ritual is performed. This restriction is maintained till the celebration. The women don't take any kind

of food made of milk during this time. But for the men and children of the house, there is no such system. They don't restrict themselves to milk and milk - made foods.

In the present time, the calves remain unfastened till twenty - one day from birth. At the time of worship, a small rope and a stick are placed beside the idol of Gorakhnath. After the completion of worship, the stick is touched softly in the manner of beating the body of the calf, and then the calf is fastened with the given rope for the first time. This worship of Gorakhnath is performed to thank him for bringing an able - bodied calf to this earth and also for the well - being of both the mother cow and the calf.

There are no rigid rules to perform the ritual. The women of the house can perform this puja without the help of any priest. Besides the devotees, there are a group of 'kirtaniyas' who sing the magnificence of Gorakhnath through 'kirtans'. The devotees can hand over the whole ritual to a priest also. This is completely optional. Generally, this ritual takes place during the evening. There is no such rigidity to keep fast for the performance. After eating vegetarian foods, the housewives can perform the ritual. Before sitting to worship, the mistress of the house prepares 'kheer' from the milk of the mother cow as an oblation. 'Naru' is prepared from this 'kheer'. Some narus are kept aside to make "vanger-naru" with cannabis. As cannabis is a part of the oblation for the worship of Shiva, it is also a mandatory ingredient of the ritual of Gorakhnath. After the completion of the worship, these "vanger-naru" are distributed among men only. Women don't take this offering.

The devotees decorate the idol of Gorakhnath on an altar with flowers. In front of the idol, an auspicious pot is laid with ' amrapallav', betel leaf and guava. Dots of sindur are mandatory in this pot and on the 'amrapallav'. The rope and the stick are put on alter to receive blessings. It is believed that this blessed rope and stick will domesticate the calf, and no harm will fall upon the calf. 'Naru' - made of Kheer, fruits, sweets, and cannabis are offered as oblations. Cannabis is decorated in a particular container called 'kolke'. This 'kolke' is a small, narrow earthen pot. In the case of Tinnath worship, three 'kolke's are offered, and one is adequate for the separate worship of Gorakhnath. This ' kolke ' is wrapped with small pieces of red cotton cloth, which is known as 'shaluk'. The shaluk is considered as a sacred ingredient of this ritual. Without 'shaluk', the 'kolke' with cannabis cannot be offered. The process of worship and the performance of kirtan go on simultaneously. Another important note is that the lamp must remain ignited throughout the whole performance. It should not be extinguished for a single moment. The extinguished lamp during the worship connotes an ominous sign upon the family note as well as the cows. The songs of the 'kirtans' are mainly the legendary tales of Gorakhnath's glorious activities. In his livelihood, how Gorakhnath saved cows from hazardous situations, how he rescued them from severe diseases with the help of his yoga - all these are the basic ideas of the songs. Here is such a ballad-

"Hasere goyalini hate niya mata
Tarpore jiya uthe goyalinir byata
Hasere goyalinir mao hate niya dao
Hasere goyalini hate niya mata
Shatsoya gabi banchilo, noysoya bachha"

[When the cattlegirl comes out with the pot of worship, her son becomes alive / at this the mother of the cattlegirl becomes exalted / the worship of cattlegirl saves seven hundred cows and nine hundred calves.]

These "kirtans" are not inscribed anywhere. This type of glorious song is orally transmitted from generation to generation. This 'kirtan' is an inseparable part of this ritual. Here is a ballad which concludes the ceremony-

"Aroni re bhai Aroni, mao lokhkhi chori
Mao lokhkhi dilo bor, dhankula dui bar kor
Dhan dibi na dibi kori, songe dibi sonar nori
Sonar nori, rupa fal; baghe mohishe jurche hal
Thubbo.....
Sonibare gai biyailo, robibare deo sunailo
Magon deo go barit jai, gondacharek naru chai,
Magon deo go barit jai."

[brother Aroni, maa Lakshmi has given her boon / you should give alms of paddy seeds full of two pots / if you don't give paddy seeds, you will give money along with gold made stick / the body of the plough is made of gold and the nozzle is of silver / tiger and buffalo are plowing together / give alms and a few narus, we will go home now].

Just after the accomplishment, the worshipper throws some narus into the roof of the cowshed. Generally, the roof of the cow - shed is built with tin. Here is also a custom regarding the throwing. The narus should not be returned to the yard from the wavy tin. The narus must have fallen on the other side of the cowshed. This action is performed by the cattleman of the house. This activity implies an effort to keep the cowshed safe from any kind of harm. After this deed, some 'narus' are fed to the calf and the mother cow. There is a belief that this is a blessing as well as medicine for the calf and the mother cow. Along with this feeding ceremony, the devotees worship them with a lamp and incense sticks. After bowing down in front of the idol, all the members of the house touch the feet of the calf and the mother cow as part of the ceremony. Then the cattleman beats the calf softly and fastens the calf by putting the blessed rope around its neck. Lastly, the offerings are distributed to the devotees, kirtanias and the common people. The cannabis with the 'kolke' is especially given to the kirtanias. Even amid the performance of kirtan, they used to have the cannabis as prasad of Baba Gonakhnath. On that day, they don't smoke from other 'kolke', they only smoke from the particular offered 'kolke'. All of them share the same 'kolke'. Through eating the narus made of kheer, the women of the house start to have the milk ceremonially.

Rajbanshi farmers and Palia farmers from Dinajpur- Rangpur district worship Gorakhnath differently. Generally, this ritual is maintained by the Hindus of Bangladesh. They keep a piece of wood smeared with oil and sindur in the corner of the cowshed as the emblem of Gorakhnath. They worship this wooden piece with various obituaries. The Hindu farmers of Pabna district observe "Gorakhnath's Brata", whereas in Maymarsingha and Dhaka 'Gorakhnath's Shirni' is celebrated as folk culture. They worship Gorakhnath after thirty days of the birth of a calf. They prepare the image of a calf, a swastika from the kheer along with narus. The cowboy put all these offerings in a banana leaf inside the cowshed. They believe that at night, Gorakhnath will come and take this oblation. This 'shirini' ritual is mainly for the purpose of having more milk from cows. The women of the house make 'payesh' that day and serve among all the cowboys of the area. After eating this 'payesh', they hit the cows with their uncleaned hands. This folklore says that this ritual will increase the milk of the mother cow. In this context, some ballads are performed.

Along with the Nath Sampradaya, different Hindu communities of the two Bengals worship Guru Gorakshnath as the protector of cows. The first milk, as well as the first calf, is offered to Gorakhnath, symbolizing purity and devotion. In the region of Katwa, magnificent large earthen statues of horses are devoted in the form of Gorakhnath. Beyond the Nath Sampradaya, the Kotals from the Rarh Bangla are the passionate devotees of Gorakhnath. The Kotals keep fast on the day of the yearly ceremony, embodying their devotion and spiritual deduction. In the village of Khowaidanga of Ketugram police station, Gorakhnath is worshipped with great pomp and grandeur. Gradually, this ritual has spread over the remote areas of the Rarh Bangla. In the district of CoochBehar, the Nath Sampradaya worships Gorakhnath as the protector of cows, while the local Rajbanshis and the other community's worship Tinnath for the same purpose. Being a historical man, Gorakhnath is the first mankind who appears as a legendary character and then becomes a divine person in the eyes of the common folk. The treatise 'Gorakh Bijay' not only celebrates his remarkable accomplishments in Yoga but also underscores the magnificence of his entity.

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