Chapter -1.

The revelation of the cult of Lord Tāraknāth and the consequent evolution of Tārakeswar as a place of pilgrimage.
The evolution of Tārakeswar as a place of pilgrimage, is linked to history and legend. This holy centre for pilgrimage owes its name and fame to the hallowed cult of Lord Tāraknāth. There was no human endeavour behind the initiation of this cult of Śiva at Tārakeswar. Hence, the self-manifested cult of Lord Tāraknāth is of Svayambhulingam type. This can be asserted with reference to Svayambhulingādi lakṣaṇam in the Prāṇtosanī Tantra. The description given in it of the salient features of a Svayambhulingam, indeed, relates to the hallowed revelation of Lord Tāraknāth, the presiding deity of this place of pilgrimage in Eastern India.

In this context, one may take into account ample references to the twelve Jyotirlingams along with the other Śivalingams in the Satarudra Sanibitā and the Kotirudra Sanibitā of the Śiva Purāṇa. But no allusion has been made in these, either to Lord Tāraknāth as an important Śivalingam or to Tārakeswar as a Śivakṣetra of purānic origin. This seems surprising given the reference to


2. “Lingam hi dvividham proktam krtrimakrtrimanca tat/ Aktrimam svayambhutam svayambhubānalingādi, krtrimam, nirmītam dhātulingādi.”

(The Lingams are of two types- unreal and real. The self-manifested Lingams are real while those made up of metals are unreal.)

Also,

“Nānāchidrasuṣaṃjuktam nānābarṇa samanavitam // Adrṣṭamūlam yalligam karkaṣam bhuvidrıṣyate”/

(Usually the Svayambhulingams are of different colours bearing numerous pores on themselves. Besides, these are coarse in nature and devoid of their ends.)

Lord Baidyanāth of Deoghar in Bihār. This is also the case in the Dvādas’ Jyotirlinga Stotram in the Stavakavacaṃālā by Satish Chandra Mukherjee.

Metaphysically, Śīva is pure consciousness, perfect enlightenment and the symbol of pure intelligence (Viśuddha Sattva). The white colour of the Lord bears a subtle harmony with his metaphysical nature. As Lord Śīva is worshipped as the origin of everything of this universe (Viśvabījām), it is in fact difficult to imagine Śīva in his original form. Therefore, he can best be conceived through a symbol which conveniently corresponds to the Lingam. Besides, there is an explicit reference to the derivation of the term Lingam in the Skandapurāṇa which belittles the idea of conceiving it as merely a symbol of generative power. He, indeed, is symbolised with his inherent characteristics.


7. “Ākāsām liṅgāmyāḥuh prthivi tāṣṭya piṭhikā, /

Ālayah sarvadevānām, layanāti liṅgāmyucayate.” //

(The sky is entitled as Lingam, the earth is its base. It is the abode of the genre of gods where everything meets with an end. Therefore, the sky corresponds to the Lingam.)

through the Lingam which corresponds in no way to the cult of Śiva in a primordial form of phallic worship. In fact, this degeneration in the conception of the holy manifestation of Śiva through Lingam owes much to the lucid description of the authors of the Purāṇas. Rudra with his inherent traits as depicted in the Rigveda and Yajurveda is totally absent with his all encompassing dimensions in the Purāṇas. This use of mean connotation no doubt betrays the poverty of the philosophical outlook of the authors of the Purāṇas.

The Svayambhulīṅgam at Tārkēswar in the Southern Rābh region is worshipped from the initial phase of the revelation as Anādiliṅgam by devotees in general. It is interesting to note that the Svayambhulīṅgam (Anādiliṅgam) at this place of pilgrimage resembles the spectacular type of Śivalīṅgam as depicted in the chapter entitled Brahmkānda in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa (7/8). An allusion can be found in the same compilation to a region with the name of Rābhī-Kbaḍa-Jāngal which happens to have fallen within the periphery of Northern Rābh. The neighbourhood of the Rābhī-Kbaḍa-Jāngal included the places like Bakreswar, Bīrbhūmi, Baidyanāth as well as rivulets like the Ajay and also some rivers. It seems that the Kāṇdi subdivision of present-day Murshidābād district along with the whole of Bīrbhūm district as well as the northern part of the Kātwā subdivision of Burdwan district comprised the regional entity of Northern Rābh.

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The earliest references to Southern Rāṛh may be found in the inscription of Vākpati Muṇī or Vākpatirāja II (A.D. 972- A.D. 993), the most powerful ruler of the Paramāra dynasty as well as in the NāyaKandali compiled by Śrīdharāchārya (991-992). The NāyaKandali refers to Bhūrisṛṣṭī as an important village in the Southern Rāṛh inhabited mostly by well-versed Brāhmins as well as wealthy merchants. The reference bears,

\[
\begin{align*}
\& \text{Asidākṣinārdhāyaṁ dwijānāṁ bhūrikarmanāṁ} \\
\& \text{Bhūrisṛṣṭiriti gramo bhūrisṛṣṭiḥjanāśrayah} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Moreover, the reference to Southern Rāṛh also occurs in the Pravodhacandrodaya (Act II), a drama compiled by Krishna Misra presumably in either the 11th or the 12th century. Both Śrīdharāchārya and Krishna Misra had referred to Bhūrisṛṣṭhi or Bhūrisṛṣṭī and Nabagrām as two important villages in the Southern Rāṛh. Moreover, an allusion had also been made to Rāṛha or Rāṛhaṇḍi as well as Bhūrisṛṣṭhi or Bhūrisṛṣṭī in the Pravodhacandrodaya by Krishna Misra. This Rāṛha or Rāṛhaṇḍi happened to have fallen within the geographical perspective of Gauḍā which included the region surrounding the present districts Māldā, Murshidābād, Bīrbhūm and Burdwan. Besides, references to Southern Rāṛh are also explicit in the Chandīmanoḷ (1593 -94) compiled by Kabikankan Mukundarām. He was born in the village of Dāmunyā on the south bank of the river Dāmodar which is now in the district of Burdwan. However, Bhūrisṛṣṭhi or Bhūrisṛṣṭī is at present in the district of Howrah while Nabagrām as well as Dāmunyā are in the districts of Hooghly and Burdwan respectively now-a-days. Therefore, it can safely be argued in the light of the above discussion that the geographical entity of Howrah, Hooghly and several parts of Burdwan did fall within the region known as Southern Rāṛh9.

It is remarkable that Kabikarkan had given a vivid account of almost all the important as well as holy places in and around Dāmūnyā. But he made no allusion to the cult of Lord Tāraknāth at Tārakeswar which, indeed, fell within the regional entity of Southern Rārb. Moreover, Dāmūnyā was not far from Tārakeswar. Although Kabikarkan was oblivious to the revelation of the cult of Lord Tāraknāth in the district of Hooghly of Southern Rārb, reference can be had of Tārakeswar with obvious implication to the cult in the Śrī Mabālingesvarā Tantra\(^\text{10}\). He could not have missed the opportunity of referring to the cult of Lord Tāraknāth at Tārakeswar had it come within his purview, although he referred to even Chakrāditya Śiva of his native village. Perhaps, the people at large in and around this place of pilgrimage were in the dark about the charismatic cult of Lord Tāraknāth prior to or even during the period of the poet of the Chandimangal. But it was probable that the Svayambhulingam had been there, at Tārakeswar, from time immemorial along with Baidyanāth, Bakrēśvar, Siddhināth, Ghantesvar and the other Śivalingams in and around Bengal. Therefore, it seems that the growth of this place of pilgrimage in association with the cult is, indeed, a recent phenomenon\(^\text{11}\). Despite aforesaid assertions; we should also consider the historical probability that the places associated with Śaiva worship were mentioned in certain texts only after the worship had been introduced. Such texts were composed, indeed, in mythological style by the priests and their patrons with a view to disseminating the cult.

\(\text{10. } \) 'Jhārkhande Vaidyanātho Bakrēśvarastathaiva ca l, Virabhūmau Siddhinātho Rārhe ca Tārakesvara./' 

\(\text{11. } \) Baidyanāth is in Jhārkhand. Bakrēśvar and Siddhināth are in Bīrbhūm and Tārakeswar is in the Rārb.)


The place is not shown in Rennell’s Atlas (1779-1781), but it appears in the survey maps of 1830-1845 as Tāressure. This place of pilgrimage gradually flourished along with the initiation of the monastery system after the revelation of the cult. Tāressure has also been considered the ancient name of this famous pilgrim town of Tārakeswar in the Tārakeswar Śivatattva. The compilation of this book was the result of an earnest endeavour by Satishchandra Giri, the last Mohānta of the Giri order at Tārakeswar Math. Despite its lack of commitment to the chronological perspective of history, this book seems to be an important one so far as it represents the viewpoint of the establishment with regard to the antecedents of this place of pilgrimage, during the process of evolution, at the behest of the Giri Mohāntas.

That the place was little known owing to relative inaccessibility, can also be corroborated with reference to the Tārakeswar Bandana compiled by Dwija Sahadeb in the form of a hand written Punthi (manuscript) in 1244 B.S (1837 A.D.). This manuscript has been kept at present in the custody of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. He stressed the point unequivocally that the place was not inhabitable for a long time simply because of its being covered with dense reeds


Also,

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and *Ulu* (*Imperata Arundinacea*) grass that grew on swampy land\textsuperscript{15}. The poet was a resident of the village Nandanbāti of Bāligari *Paraganā* in the vicinity of Tārakeswar. In fact, the lyrical exposition of the place and the cult leads us to no definite conclusion regarding the possible time of the revelation of the *Śivalingam* at Tārakeswar. Therefore, local myths and ballads guide us upto a certain point, but not beyond that.

There is no denying that the region in which Tārakeswar was situated remained scarcely populated prior to and even immediately after the revelation of the cult of Lord Tāraknāth. But it is amazing that Khānakul- Krishnanagar, which is not far from Tārakeswar, was densely populated in the first half of the sixteenth century. This place was famous for the *Śripata* of Gopāla Abhirāma Kṛṣnadāsa, an important follower of Nityānanda. In fact, Tārakeswar was almost uninhabitable primarily because of its deterring geographical perspective. This proposition can easily be substantiated with reference to O' Malley's description of the region in which Tārakeswar is situated. "Further inland between the Dāmodar and the Dwārakeswar there is a tract of low lying land, which, unless protected by embankments, is more or less liable to constant floods, as the boundary rivers with their connected streams, are gradually raising their beds by annual deposits of silt and sand. In the rains this tract becomes a sheet of water, from which the village sites stand out like small islands. Owing to its liability to submersion, cultivation is precarious" \textsuperscript{16}. The Dāmodar has been much more harmful than the Hooghly, and there are records of its ravages for over the

\textsuperscript{15} "Bandiba baner madhye khepā Pashupati/
chāridike Ulu Khāgrā Benār basati./" 

(I shall worship the insane Pashupati within the forest strewn with *Ulu*, *Khāgra* and *Benā* grasses on all sides.)

last hundred years\textsuperscript{17}. Naturally “the over flooding of embankments, frequent change of courses, total blockade of drainage systems giving rise to swamps and marshes” made this region almost uninhabitable\textsuperscript{18}.

The place finds mention in the \textit{Śivāyana} of Rāmkrishna Dās, who, according to Dinesh Chandra Bhattachāryya, flourished in the first half of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century\textsuperscript{19}. This book, published at the behest of \textit{Bangīya Sāhitya Parishad}, makes it quite clear that the \textit{Svayambhulītīgām} at Tārakeswar was in rather inaccessible place even before its hallowed manifestation and the corresponding growth of the pilgrim town along with the initiation of the monastery system. Dinesh Chandra Bhattachāryya emphatically opined that the poet of the \textit{Śivāyana} was fully aware of the manifestation of the cult in its primordial shape\textsuperscript{20}.

In spite of O’Malley’s assertion that “the village is not old, nor is the shrine”, the fact remains that the \textit{Svayambhulītīgām} in its primordial shape was known at least to the local people\textsuperscript{21}. This proposition becomes amply clear also from the engraving, “Śuvamastu Śakābda- 1543” on a stone-slab in the frontal part of the dome-shaped shrine at Tārakeswar. In fact, “Śakābda -1543” corresponds to 1621 A.D. This, however, gives credence to the familiarity of the place as holy before its formal inception.

\textsuperscript{17} ibid. – P.- 150.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. – P.- 726.
\textsuperscript{20} Māsik Rasumāti. Bhādra. 1362 B.S. PP.- 800- 801.
The case filed against the monastery at Tārakeswar by the Government of Bengal in 1838 and the verdict of the Collector of Hooghly seem quite important in this context for ascertaining the period of the gradual emergence of Tārakeswar as a place of pilgrimage. According to the verdict, "Rājā Bhāramalla gifted some landed properties for the maintenance of the temple services and regular worship of Lord Tāraknātha. The area of land gifted, spread between the villages Jote Saman, Jote Sambhu, Bijpur (Bhanjipur) and Sāhāpur. As these were insufficient for meeting the expenses of daily services to the deity, the Mahārajaś of Burdwan namely Jagat Roy, Kirti Chandra Roy and Tilak Roy also donated land to one of the predecessors of Mohanchandra Giri, the Mobānta of the monastery at Tārakeswar, during the initial phase. The Collector, however, conceded that the ancestors of the bibādi (contestant) had been enjoying the landed properties long before the initiation of the British Rāj in India."  

However, Mohanchandra Giri incidentally produced some Chārpatras (letters of exemption) before the court which revealed that the landed properties under reference had been shown as rent-free for the services to the deity. Reference can be made to two such Chārpatras dated as 26 Chaitra, 1162 B.S. and 12 Bhādra, 1169 B.S. Therefore, these documents, if considered valid, allow us to determine the period of the revelation of the cult along with gradual evolution of Tārakeswar prior to 1162 B.S. or 1755 A.D.  

Mohanchandra Giri, the twenty-second Mobānta of the monastery at Tārakeswar, had also produced, on requirement, before the court a deed of grant of 1025 bighās and 11 cottāhs of land (342 acres app.) signed by Rājā Bhāramalla on 10 Chaitra, 785 B.S. The fact that the year mentioned along with signature on the

deed of grant had been forged, was proved beyond doubt. It was upheld on scrutiny that the digit ‘1’ had unscrupulously been deleted with an obvious motive to push back the date of establishment of twin institutions – the temple as well as the monastery. The Collector was against the acceptance of the deed as genuine simply because it would amount to pushing back the year of emergence of the twin institutions purposely a few hundred years. Therefore, it was clearly held that the monastery at Tarakeswar was institutionalised in 1785 Sambat or 1729 A.D. at the behest of the Giri Mobānta. In one of the oldest compilations, Kedārnāth Sarkār put forward more or less the same date regarding the origin of the shrine of Lord Tāraṅgaṭa.

It will be not be out of context to point out that the information regarding the measurement of the land – 1023 bigbās gifted through the deed of grant—as put forward by Sudhīr Kumār Mitra in his ‘Hooghly Jelār Itibās O Bangasamāj’, is at variance with the version of Satishchandra Giri, the last Giri Mobānta at Tārakeswar Math. Satishchandra Giri’s reference to the claim of Mohanchandra Giri, the twenty-second Mobānta in succession, regarding 1025 bigbās and 11 cottābs of land in the possession of the monastery as liṅkerāj definitely contradicts the proposition of the author of the aforesaid compilation. This claim had incidentally been put forward while the East India Company was on the prowl for resuming liṅkerāj lands. As a matter of fact, “508 bigbās were resumed by the government and about 517 bigbās were released after a great deal of litigation…”


26. Title Suit No. 28/1922.

D.Sinharoy and others VS. Satishchandra Giri. Suit Under Sec.92; Civil Procedure Code. Para. – 16.
This earnest endeavour of the administration of the company towards resuming the lakheraj lands can be corroborated with reference to the 'Historical Introduction to the Bengal Portion of the Fifth Report'. The Government made it unequivocally clear that “the holders of tāluks, jāgirs and lakheraj lands were to be given a reasonable time in which to display their title deeds; forfeiture of the lands to Government was to be the penalty for undue delay; and transfers of tāluks unconfirmed by deeds signed by the Nawāb, were to be regarded as void and the lands forfeited to Government.”\textsuperscript{27}

That Tārakeswar had evolved as a religious centre for the Hindus during the early part of the 18th century can also be corroborated with reference to LT.Col.D.G. Crawford who opined that Bishnudās, the Rājā of Rāmnagar, probably came to Bengal during the first quarter of the 18th century\textsuperscript{28}. It is also noteworthy to mention about what had been recorded by virtue of a statement given by Dharanidhar Sinhāroy, one of the plaintiffs in the Title Suit No. 28/1922, on 30 July,1926. The statement as follows; “We originally came to Bengal from the west. Our ancestor who came to Bengal first, was Keshab Hāzāri. He had two sons— Rāo Bhārāmalla and Rājā Bishnudās. We are the direct descendants of Rājā Bishnudās. I am tenth in succession from him”. If three generations conform to a century, the period marked for the initiation of the twin institutions is pushed back accordingly to the first half of the 17th century, which seems quite absurd.

Moreover, ‘Bribat Tārakeswar Mābhātmya' compiled by Pundit Nibāranchandra Smritiīrthā points to the gradual development of this place of pilgrimage immediately after the migration of this Rājput Kshatriya family to Bengal from Northern India. The descendants of Bishnudās scattered in and around the

\textsuperscript{27} W.K. Firminger- \textit{Historical Introduction to the Bengal Portion of the Fifth Report}. Cal.1917. P.- 192.

\textsuperscript{28} Lt. Col. D.G. Crawford – \textit{A Brief History of the Hugli District}. 

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district of Hooghly take pride in tracing their lineage to him. The ruins of Bishnudās’s palace at Rāmnagar and also at Bāhirgarh where he shifted his residence afterwards are visible even at present. Rāmnagar lies about 12.8 kms. to the south-east off Tārakeswar while Bāhirgarh lies about 4 kms. to the south-west off this place of pilgrimage. Swāmī Vishnusivānanda Giri also refers to the fact of migration of this family to this part of Bengal around 1740 A.D. 29

On the basis of above discussion, it can be propounded that the revelation as well as popularity of the cult and the gradual emergence of this place of pilgrimage had definitely begun not earlier than the late twenties of the eighteenth century. But here is no denying that the cult of Lord Tāraknāth was here at Tārakeswar long before its revelation as Swayambhulingam or Anādīlingam.

III

However, the legendary perspective of the Swayambhulingam at Tārakeswar strikingly corresponds to similar legends associated with almost all the places of Hindu pilgrimage 30. The legend common all over India, of cows shedding their milk secretly in unfrequented parts of forest, leading to the discovery of godheads is also told about the revelation of the Śivalingam at Tārakeswar. The discoverer in the present case was one Mukunda Ghosh, a member of the Gopa (milkman) caste and cattle keeper of Rājā Bishnudās, the Chhatrī zamindār of Bāligari, not far-off from Tārakeswar 31. L.S.S.O’ Malley seems to be wrong in his


opinion that Rāja Bhārāmalla discovered the “sacred stone” while wandering about the neighbourhood as a “religious mendicant” 32. The last Giri Mobānta was, in fact, opposed to these assertions. He was emphatic in his proposition that Māyāgiri Dūmrapān, the first Mobānta of the Tārakeswar Math, was the first witness to the revelation of the Śivalingam33. But the deed of grant given to Māyāgiri by Rāja Bhārāmalla contradicts not only the statement of O’Malley but also that of the last Giri Mobānta.

According to popular legend, the unmanifested Anādilingam in the forest covered with dense reeds and surrounded on all sides by swampy lands, was used for grinding paddy by the village women. This resulted in the creation of a cavity on the surface of the unassuming chunk of stone. Apart from being used as a favourite haunt for the village kids, this place was also considered as a lucrative pasture for cattle34. Mukunda Ghosh, the chief cowherd of Rāja Bishnudās and a resident of Ghurebhātā village not far-off from Tārakeswar, also used to graze the cattle in this pasture35. While temporarily residing in the woods of Tārakeswar, then known by the name of Jote Savārām, he observed that many cows entered the jungle with udders full of milk and returned with them empty36. Anxious to discover the same, one day he followed a kine and


saw her discharging milk on a stone which had a deep hollow in it. He instantly reported this mysterious behaviour of the kine to Rājā Bhārāmalla, the brother of Rājā Bishnudasā.

On verification, Rājā Bhārāmalla in consultation with his elder brother decided to bring the sacred stone to a deserving place within his domain. The korās or labourers employed to dig up the sacred stone spent a whole day at the work without reaching its under side. The worried Rājā dreamt at night that the Lord appeared to him and ordered him not to dig up the sacred stone, but to build over it a temple. He related his dream to his brother Rājā Bishnudasā and the two brothers accordingly rendered yeoman service to the erection of the temple of Lord Tāraknāth over the ‘sacred stone’. The original temple having fallen in decay, the present structure of the temple was erected by the Rājā of Burdwān. This legendary perspective is in no way corroborated by citations from ancient texts.

IV

In the ‘List of Ancient Monuments of Burdwān District’, Lt. Col. D. G. Crawford refers to a Kshatriya King Bishnudasā living at Mobābā Garkālinjar in the province of Oudh early in the 18th century. In fact, he was a big zamindār of Hariharpur in the pergānā of Dobhi of Jaunpur district on the bank of the river Gomati. As he could not sustain the pressure from Balwant Singh, the Rājā of Benāras at the behest of Sādāt Ali, the Musalmān Nawāb of Oduh, he thought it wise to leave the place and emigrate to Bengal along with about five hundred

people of his own caste and one hundred Brāhmins from Kanauj. The fact that the Rājās of Benāras carried out extensive military operations from 1732 onwards with full recognition of the Nawāb of Oudh against all other Rājās in their territories as well as against some of the Rājput Brāhmin and Bhūmibār corporate bodies is clearly elaborated in Bernard S. Cohn's essay on the 'Structural Change in Rural Society'.

Probably, the process of giving undue pressure on this zamindār family concerned had begun well before 1732 that ultimately forced Rājā Bishnudās to settle at Rāmnagar-- a village then in the district of Burdwan and now in Hooghly. It seems more so on the background of institutionalisation of twin institutions at Tārakeswar in 1729 under their patronage. However, "the inhabitants of the neighbourhood suspected them of being robbers and sent word to the Nawāb of Bengal at Murshidābād that a large gang of marauders, in complete armour and with strange beards and moustaches, had come and settled near Haripāl. The Nawāb having sent for them, the Rājā presented himself, and said that they were harmless folk who only wanted some land whereon to settle. Tradition states that, to prove his innocence, Rājā Bishnudās went through the ordeal by fire, holding in his hand a red-hot iron bar without sustaining injury. The Nawāb was convinced of his honesty and gave him a grant of 500 bighās of land (equal to 1,500 bighās at the present day) eight miles from Tārakeswar".

The Tātdād (a register containing the description of the boundary of a plot of land), numbered 1931, preserved in the Collectorate of Hooghly shows this


Also,

grant as rent-free. Despite O'Malley's repeated hesitance in naming the then Nawāb of Bengal, it seems against the background of these developments that they emigrated to Bengal either during the last years of Murshid Quli's rule over Bengal or in the beginning of Sujāuddin's (1727-39) tenure. Evidently, the legendary perspective does not suffer from concoction and, indeed, bears a definite historical background.

Rājā Bishnudas was very happy to settle himself as zamindār in the pristine locality of Rāmnagar. Thereafter, Rājā Bhārāmalla, as the successor to his elder brother made permanent arrangements for regular worship of the deity. Reference has already been made to the deed of grant of 1025 bighās and 11 cottāhs of land gifted by Rājā Bhārāmalla in the name of Lord Tāraknāth and also to the consequent appointment of Māyāgiri Dhūmrapān, a Dashnāmi Śāiva Sannyāsī as the Mobānta of the Tārakeswar Math. Henceforward, the Mobānta was made responsible to look after the twin institutions-the temple and the Math. Meanwhile, Rājā Bhārāmalla had been initiated into Sannyāsa at the behest of Māyāgiri Dhūmrapān. In fact, Rājā Bhārāmalla was never the first Mobānta as was erroneously believed by O'Malley.

Mukunda Ghosh was not, indeed, denied contextual relevance possibly because of his association with the process of the revelation of the cult at least during the initial phase. H. R. Sanyāl's assertion that Mukunda Ghosh was ordered by Lord Śiva in his dream to dig out the Anādilingam and arrange for his worship contradicts the generally held traditional version as well as the version given in

45. Satishchandra Giri – Tārakeswar Śivatattva. P.-70
the Bengal District Gazetteers (Hooghly) 47. However, he was advised by the Rājā to take recourse to Sannyāsa in honour of the cult of Lord Śiva in the month of Chaitra (March- April) each year. Moreover, Rājā Bhārāmalla made it a point that until and unless a successor to Mukunda Ghosh was initiated into Sannyāsa in the beginning of the last month of the Bengali calendar in continued process, none would have the right to initiation thenceforward 48. This custom is in vogue even in these days. S. K. Mitra was perhaps mistaken in his assertion, as was also Prafulla Chakrabarty, that the mortal remains of Mukunda Ghosh had been buried within the precinct of the sacred complex as a mark of respect to the departed soul 49. In fact, the Samādhi Kṣetra (burial space) adjacent to the temple of Lord Tāraknāth in the east was dedicated to one Mukunda Giri at the behest of Māyāgiri Dhuṃrapān, the first Giri Mobanta of the monastery at Tārakeswar 50. He is being worshipped to date as the Bhairab (incarnation) of the cult of Lord Śiva at Tārakeswar.

V

Legend apart, Tārakeswar, according to historical evidence, appears to have been a Śaiva centre prior to Bishnudās’s time 51. Since the establishment of the temple of Lord Tāraknāth in the early 18th century by the immigrant Kṣatriya king in association with the Śaiva monk of the Giri order of Dāsbanmī Sannyāsīs, it

47. H. R. Sanyal – Social Mobility in Bengal. P.- 87.
has already passed through several phases. Tārakeswar, at present, is a growing town in a rural setting in West Bengal. In fact, the Dashnāmi Saivas assumed control of this centre with subsidiary seats at Guptipāra, Nayangarh, Bhotbāgān, Baidyabāti, Garh Bhawānīpur, Santoshpur and Chaipāt under the patronage of Rājā Bhārāmalla. Incidentally, the Mohānta of the Tārakeswar Math became the Mahāmanḍalesvar (head) of the Maṇḍali (assembly) of Mohāntas stationed at other places 52.

The primary motive behind taking initiative for the erection of the temple of Lord Tāraknāth at Tārakeswar was possibly that the Kṣatrigya zamindār of Rāmnagar desired to uphold his status and dignity among the peasants and artisans constituting the majority around the sacred complex. He could have indulged in this endeavour also with the end in view of making capital of the religious sentiments of the inhabitants. There is no denying the fact that Lord Śiva with purānic perspective wields special appeal for the people belonging to the lower castes. In fact, Lord Śiva, as depicted in Bengali literature, is not the same one with whom we are acquainted in Brāhminical literature including the Vedas. He, indeed, has been transformed into a typical Bengali God 53. Human interest in the family life of Lord Śiva, therefore, far outweighs the interest in his divine nature. So it was quite natural that the rural population in and around the sacred complex with mostly low caste ingredients emotionally associated themselves with the endeavour of the Kṣatriya zamindār for the establishment of the temple complex at Tārakeswar.

52. Ibid. – P.- 726.

“Temple-building was, indeed, a very important form of social service in traditional society. At the sametime temples represented the wealth and social power of the founder and were also a medium of spreading and consolidating influence”\textsuperscript{54}. Therefore, it was only natural for the Rājā to tread this path with an eye to achieving a permanent place in the history of the evolution of this place of pilgrimage. Apart from the Chhatri zamindār, the Māhārājā of Burdwan and one Gobardhan Rakshit of Pātulsandhipur near Seikhālla in the district of Hooghly as well as Chintāmani De of Howrah had also probably been guided to some extent with this consideration in mind while taking part in the initiative for the rejuvenation of the temple and Nātyamandira in due course\textsuperscript{55}.

The shrine consists of two parts, the sanctum and the verandah or porch in front of it. The sanctum is plain within, with the Lingam in the middle. Its exterior architecturally resembles a Bengali hut. The floor has a marble pavement. Facing this porch is a large open hall with a roof supported by pillars and a floor paved with marble. The temple is fully surrounded by houses on all sides, so that no good view of it can be obtained from outside\textsuperscript{56}.

In order to explore various facets of sacred traditions of Tārakeswar, a few points must also be noted, from where the traditional and mythological pageant of the sacred complex in Tārakeswar can be viewed at a glance. These are: (i) The cult of Lord Tāraknātha; (ii) the cult of Goddess Kālī; (iii) the cult of Lord Dāmodar Nārāyan and (iv) the cult of Dudhpukur. These cults are intertwined with the principal cult of Lord Tāraknātha.

\textsuperscript{54} H. R. Sānyāl – Social Mobility in Bengal. PP.- 67- 68.


However, the Rājā of Rāmnagar might not have visualised the wider social relevance of the cult in the context of the incessant inflow of pilgrims at Tārakeswar from almost all over India in the far future. With its potentiality to cater to the socio-religious needs of a large section of the rural population, this sacred complex at present can rival other places of pilgrimage of countrywide repute. In short, this growth and the fame it has earned over the years, owe much to the revelation of the cult of Lord Tāraknāth. Therefore, the evolution of this place of pilgrimage minus the cult of Lord Tāraknāth would become meaningless.